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HEARTS:

Queen, Knave, and Deuce.

BY DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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George Munro

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HEARTS:

QUEEN, KNAVE, AND DEUCE.

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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HEARTS: QUEEN, KNAVE, AND DEUCE.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG man attired in the height of the fashion of 1870 was no very strange figure in the Strand on any evening of that year; and Tom Carroll, though gloriously bedizened, excited no unusual admiration or regard. A handsome young Briton, with a gay, honest face and friendly eyes—at first sight a likable lad—he was pleasant enough to look at, as he walked, head well up, and eyes smiling, prosperous and contented with the world, and evidently disposed to be on kindly terms with all men. It was in the dusk of a summer evening, and the spire of St. Clements Dane's was backed by a celestial golden fleece, which no Londoner regarded. Corners and by-places were beginning to be filled with shadows; and the street gas-lamps and the lights in the shop-windows had a sort of twilight brightness. At such times you may walk about in a shabby suit of clothes, if you will; and Tom Carroll, running full against Antonio Baretti, an old acquaintance of his, beheld at first no change in him.

This Antonio Baretti was an Italian and an artist, and only a little while ago he had begun to be a person of some note. Even if he chose to go shabby, that might be one of the affectations of successful genius. But Baretti was not yet so eminently successful that he could afford to cut a man like Tom Carroll, whose social position was indisputable, whose pockets were full of money, and whose life was spent in the pursuit of all the arts at once, and in companionship with wealthy and titled people, who relied upon his judgment in the matter of plays, pictures, and music. For Tom was a *dilettante* of the most agreeable and popular type, and a *persona grata* in all manner of high places. It was more than a little odd, therefore, that Baretti should make a palpable effort to avoid him; and it was all the

more singular because the two youngsters had been rather enthusiastic than otherwise over each other's achievements. They were good fellows, both, into the bargain.

"Why, Baretti," said Tom, stretching forth a hand and laying hold of him by the lapel of the coat, "won't you speak to a fellow?"

"I—beg your pardon," said the little Italian; "I was in a hurry and did not—" His voice trailed away, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"You're not well," said the young Englishman, bringing out a second hand and laying it on another shoulder. The artist, with an outward gesture of both hands, seemed at once to deprecate inquiry and to indicate his own condition. The velvet coat was very threadbare and crumpled. The little man's linen was unpleasantly yellow and much disarranged. His face was pallid, and his chin and cheeks were stubbly. "You're not well, Baretti. What's the matter?"

"I am not well of late," said the shabby artist; "but how are you? And how are all the little people—the opera, and the sonata, and the gavotte? And how is the landscape? Well?"

"Come and dine somewhere," returned Tom. The other repeated that outward gesture of the hands. "Come and dine. I want to have a talk with you. Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"I have not been in hiding," said Baretti, with an undeceptive pretense of gayety. Tom Carroll, with a hand on each of the little man's shoulders, looked him up and down. A button was missing from the shabby velvet jacket, and the loose threads from which it had escaped hung down untidily. The patent leather boots were cracked and broken.

"Tell me the truth," said Tom, rocking him lightly to and fro. "Come home with me to my chambers, and tell me the truth about yourself."

Baretti blushed fiercely, and then turned white. His lips began to tremble, and when he stole a look at his companion there was a gleam of tears in his black Italian eyes.

"I will go with you," he said huskily, "and I will tell you everything."

"Very well," said Tom, feigning a somewhat rollicking tone. "Come along."

He took Baretti's arm and they walked westward together, not saying much by the way. The Italian was thankful for the gathering darkness, being conscious that his companion's splendor made his own dismal aspect far more noticeable than before. The young Englishman was in his glory, for here was genius out at elbows and altogether down upon its luck, and he the happy deliverer of it, and the man appointed by fate to set it on its feet again and establish its goings. There was no better-hearted youngster in London than Tom Carroll; and if he exulted a little at the chance of doing such a service, he was none the less sorry for the other's misfortunes, whatever they might turn out to be. His heart warmed over Baretti as they walked along together, and he felt more friendly to him than he had ever done before. To be five and-twenty, and to have a good heart, and a full purse, and a friend in need of you—is there a better way to happiness?

When the pair came to No. 20 Montague Gardens, Tom Carroll admitted himself by a latch-key, and led the way upstairs into a comfortably furnished apartment, where shaded lamps and handsome curtains gave things a well-to-do and home-like look.

"Sit down, Baretti," said Tom, pushing the other gently by the shoulders. Baretti's lips were trembling more and more, and his eyes were so dim that he dared not raise them to Tom's face. "So bad as that, old chap?" said the youngster, gently.

Suddenly, to Carroll's terror and amazement, the little man wrenched himself free, and throwing himself upon his knees beside an arm-chair, burst into hysteric tears and sobs. The Englishman stood awkwardly in the middle of the room, not knowing what to do or say in such a case, and, therefore—being wise without knowing it—doing and saying nothing. In a while Baretti composed himself, and, still kneeling there, began to wipe his eyes with a woful handkerchief. The host recovered himself a little, and bustled about noisily in the next room, lighting candles on the mantel-shelf and dressing-table.

"Here, I say, Baretti," he called, when the sobs had all ceased, "you'll want a wash before dinner. I'm going down to order dinner now, and if you want anything I've put out a lot of things on the bed."

Then he withdrew by another door, and whistled ostentatiously on the landing to show that he was outside. This young man was a Briton, though an artist, and tears would have seemed a shame to him under any sort of circumstances. When Baretti had first broken out crying, Tom would have been glad for the floor to open, and he suffered acutely from a reflex shame. Half an hour had gone by before he returned to the room, and then Baretti was standing before the fire-place, not altogether at his ease, but clean and clean-shaven, and in white linen, and looking vastly improved all over. Under these altered circumstances he was a handsome little man. His eyes were full of feeling and intelligence, and as beautifully soft and bright as a dog's; his coal-black hair tumbled picturesquely about his head in handsome, disorderly profusion; his hands were white and shapely, his figure was well set, and his face well-featured and attractive.

"Dinner's coming up in a minute, Baretti," said Tom, for the mere sake of saying something.

"Carroll!" said the artist, stretching out both hands to him.

"What is it?" asked Tom, taking them in his own. "You're in trouble of some sort. Tell me what it is. If I can help you, I'll do it. Now, what is it?"

A tap at the door announced the advent of the maid, and the young Englishman dropped his friend's hands in some embarrassment.

"You shall tell me after dinner," he said, when the girl had retired; "she will be interrupting us every minute until then."

The Italian assenting, the two sat down in silence. Dinner was served, and the guest attacked his soup like a man who meant business; but pushed the fish away scarce tasted, and recoiled from the tempting cutlet which followed.

"No appetite?" said Tom.

"Too much," returned Baretti, with a poor attempt at a laugh. Tom nodded gravely, with a sympathetic glance at his guest, and on the girl's next appearance bade her clear away.

"Now, what is it?" asked the Englishman, when they were secure against further interruption. The manner of the question was frank, candid and engaging, and express-

ive of a hearty wish to be of service. "What is it? Tell me as much as you can, and let us see what we can do. What is it?"

"I am broken," said Baretti, with a tremulous lip—"absolutely and completely broken—without a roof—without a shilling—a lost man!"

"Without a roof?" the other asked, in amazed pity.

"I have lain upon the benches in St. James's Park these four nights," the little Italian answered. "I have eaten nothing until now for four days."

Tom, with a great show of righteous wrath, began to walk up and down the room, and to upbraid his companion, using much strong language, with a view to the disguise of his own emotion, after the British fashion.

"You thundering little idiot! Hang it all, Baretti! Not to tell me! You knew where I lived all the time. I take it unkindly of you—I take it infernally ill of you, Baretti."

"I was broken," urged the little artist, in extenuation. "I did not know what to do."

"Then, by George, sir," cried Tom, "you ought to have known! Here have I been going about just as jollily as ever, and I feel like a criminal now I know about it. You know very well, Baretti," with a mightily injured look, "that I have more money than I know what to do with. You know very well that you had only to ask me to have whatever you stood in need of. And, by gad! instead of coming up like a friend, and giving me the pleasure of helping you, you slink off and starve in St. James's Park. I tell you what it is, Baretti, I think it was unfriendly—confoundedly unfriendly."

"I beg your pardon," said Baretti, in quaint contrition.

"Tell me all about it," Tom returned, being in a condition to trust himself by this time. "That is—tell me what you can; and what I can I'll do."

"I would have come to you rather than to anybody," said the little Italian, with outstretching hands and moist eyes; "but I was broken at heart, and I did not care—no; not for anything."

"Tell me," said Tom.

"Did you know the Count Carambola?" asked Baretti, turning upon his host with sudden vivid passion.

"That hooked-nose, green-skinned ruffian, with the black mustache and the bald head?" demanded Tom. "I knew him as well as I wanted to."

"We thought him honorable and wealthy," cried Baretti, beginning his story with a fiery gesture of disdain.

"I didn't," interjected Carroll, dryly. "What about him?"

"I will tell you all about him," said the artist, declaiming with such gesture as only an Italian uses. "The count is a villain, a hound, a cur—a personage sunk in the depths of infamy. He came to me three months ago, when my picture was but newly hung at Burlington House, and he asked that I would lend him four hundred pounds. I laughed. I told him that when I had four hundred shillings I looked at myself as at a Rothschild. He also laughed. It was but an affair of a week, of a day, or two days; three days; but he was unknown here to the English bankers. Would I back a bill for him? He knew so well no other countryman in London. Would I so far assist him? Then when his funds came would I sell him my beautiful picture at the Academy? Would I paint more beautiful pictures for his Villa della Luna? Will you believe me, I was so much a fool that I believed him? Grand Dio, Carroll! I believed him. Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad; and I believed him. But when he came to the money-lender, he did not care for my name. He would have a bill of sale. That was the name. Do you know it? No. A bill of sale upon the poor little things in my studio, and a claim upon my picture at Burlington House. I agreed to everything gladly. The count had the money, and in a week I missed him. Then comes one friend and another. 'My dear Baretti,' they say, 'is it true that you have helped the count? He is gone; he is flown; he owes everybody money; he does always so; he is an adventurer professed.'"

"I could have told you that much at the first and only sight of his ugly face I ever had," said Tom.

"Under a blow so crushing," resumed Baretti, "what do I do? I sit still in my studio, deserted of my fancies. I try to paint. I have forgotten that a black and a white make gray. I am helpless. By and by—about a month ago—the money-lender's people come, and sell everything. My picture sells at the Academy, and they take the money

for it. There is over and above a little handful of shillings, and that they give me. That goes, and I am a lost man."

He ended with quivering lips, moved anew by the narration of his own wrongs and sufferings, and dropped dejectedly in an arm-chair that stood near.

"And, of course," said Tom, "you've never heard of the count again?"

The little artist sat like a statue of despondency, with nose and knees together, and his arms hanging helplessly at his side; but at this query he sprung to his feet, and answered with wild gesticulation!

"The count? He is flown to his own Phlegethon!"

"Best place for him," said Tom, quietly. "Let him stop there!"

"Willingly," answered Baretti, with a bitter laugh, and dropped back into the arm-chair.

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Carroll, patting him on the shoulder. "It's all over now. There's a stunning north light to the room overhead, and it will make a capital studio. I know it isn't engaged, and I'll just run downstairs and take it now. The bedroom at the back is thoroughly comfortable, and the place will suit you to a hair. We'll lay in whatever you want to-morrow; and you'll soon find out again that black and white are not the only things to make a gray. You don't mind staying alone for five minutes? Cigars and wine," pushing a box and a decanter forward on the table. "Make yourself comfortable. Back in five minutes."

There was a glow in Tom's heart as he ran down-stairs to chaffer with the landlady about a set of rooms for Baretti. He approved of himself, and felt that he was a good sort of fellow. By and by he returned beaming.

"I've taken the rooms, Baretti. Come and have a look at them."

The artist arose and followed him upstairs, moving like a man in a dream. Tom chattered gayly, pointing out the loftiness of the windows, and showing how the light could be arranged by moving the shutters, which had been cut across, by order of some former occupant, an artist. Next he marched Baretti into the bedroom, and dwelt at length upon its advantages, talking rather at random, lest the Italian should thank him.

"And now," he said, on regaining his own rooms,

"you'll want money for your purchases to-morrow. It will be better not to run into debt to begin with. Suppose I give you a check at once?" He sat down to write it out, still chattering the while. A ring was heard, and shortly afterward a tap sounded on the room door. "Come in," cried Tom, slipping his check-book into a drawer.

"Mr. Mark, sir," said the maid, opening the door, and she retiring, the personage announced as "Mr. Mark" entered. He was not unlike the regular occupant of the room at first sight, but a second glance showed so many differences that it began to be surprising that any likeness had appeared between them. The most marked of these differences was in expression. Tom's face was full of light and gayety. He looked frankly at all men, with a not unpleasing confidence in their approval of him, and pretty generally with a full approval in his own eyes. He was but a youngster yet, and was unaffectedly fond of people. He liked almost everybody; and that cheerful mood of mind was written on his good-looking countenance in letters of brightness. His visitor, though a handsomer man than Tom, had his personal beauties strongly discounted by an unprepossessing look of suspicion and dislike. It was likely, you might have thought, that he had but a poor opinion of men and women at large—possibly a poor opinion of himself in some directions.

"How are you?" cried Tom, heartily, rising to meet him. "I didn't know you were in town. This is my friend Baretti, Mark. I dare say you remember his picture at the Academy this year. This is my cousin Mark, Baretti—Mark Carroll."

Cousin Mark's glance took in the broken boots, the frayed shabbiness of the velvet coat—every sign of poverty the artist's dilapidated dress displayed. He bowed stiffly, and Baretti answered with a sense of discomfort and shame-facedness.

"I wouldn't have come to-night," said Mark, "had I known you were engaged. Shall you be in at twelve to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Tom. "Anything particular?"

"Rather particular," answered Mark.

"Baretti will excuse us," said Tom, brightly. "Come into the bedroom."

The little artist bowed frigidly as the new-comer passed him. Mark disregarded the salute.

"I'm in something of a hole, Tom," he said, closing the bedroom door behind him. "I want fifty pounds. Can you let me have it?"

"When do you want it?" Tom inquired.

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Tom echoed, with a rather dismal face. "I'm a little—" He cleared in a second. "Make it three instead of twelve, and I'll have it ready for you."

"All right," said Cousin Mark, a little ungraciously. "I'll be here. I say, who's that fellow?" He nodded backward toward the sitting-room.

"You've heard of Baretti," said Tom. "Rising artist. One of the most promising young painters in London."

"One would guess as much to look at him," said Mark, with a smile. His smile was less agreeable than his habitual expression, and when that is the case it generally augurs ill of a man.

"Oh," said Tom, deceptively, "that sort of man is often careless about appearances."

"I suppose," said Mark, "he's on my errand. Came to borrow money, didn't he?"

"I asked him here to dinner," Tom answered. "He's a capital fellow—one of the best fellows in the world."

"Everybody is 'one of the best fellows in the world' with you," said Mark, smiling again. "I am one of the best fellows in the world myself."

"Why, so you are," Tom answered, laughing; "I am another. Come in and have a talk with Baretti. You'll find him a charming fellow, I assure you."

"No," said Mark; "I won't stay to-night. At three to-morrow. Good-night."

The two young men came back into the sitting-room, and shook hands. Baretti's head had dropped forward as he sat in a big arm-chair near the fire, and his regular breathing betrayed the fact that he had fallen asleep. Tom laid a hand upon his shoulder to awake him, and the artist, sleepily opening his eyes, stared at him for a second or two without recognition, and rising, took two or three steps forward before he was fairly awake.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered; "I am over-fatigued."

Mark nodded with his own smile, and gently pulled Tom from the room.

"Has that rising artist," he whispered behind his hand, as they paused upon the landing—"has that rising artist ever obeyed the policeman's 'Move on, there'? He looked rather like it."

"Pooh!" said Tom, in a disconcerted way. "Three o'clock to-morrow. Good-night, Mark."

"I am ashamed to have fallen asleep," said Baretti, when his host re-entered the room; "but I am very tired."

"Of course you are," said Tom, reopening the drawer in which he had placed the check. "That," he went on, pushing the paper into Baretti's hand, "will set you going again, and leave you a little margin."

The broken artist looked from the check to Tom, from Tom to the check, like one amazed: and before the Englishman knew it, the Italian was at his feet, clasping both his hands, and pouring out an incoherent torrent of thanksgiving.

"Nonsense, man!" cried Tom, half angrily. "Get up, and don't make a fool of yourself. You would have done as much for me if the cases had been reversed."

"No," cried the painter, springing to his feet and confronting his benefactor with outstretched hands and flashing eyes, "I would not have done so much for you. But now— Am I a fiend to say that I should like to see you in misery, in want, in disgrace, in despair, that I might die to comfort you?"

"Bosh!" said the young Briton, with an air of shame. "I'm not going to fall into disgrace and misery to oblige anybody. If you do want to oblige me, Baretti, you can do it easily."

"How?" cried the little man, with a fiery gesture of interrogation, as if he would have rent his friend to pieces. "Tell me."

"Forget the count, and set to work again."

"I shall find my chance," said Baretti, with an aspect of almost tragic gloom. "You will want me some day. I shall not die until I have repaid you."

"Why, man alive," said Carroll, with feigned impatience, "you've only to set to work to be able to pay me in a month."

"To pay you what?" demanded the little man. "The

handful of money that you lend me? Yes. But the hope you gave me when I despaired? The faith I had lost in human nature? The life I should have thrown away to-night?"

"You never meant that, Baretti?" Tom demanded gravely. The painter's eyes fell, and his head drooped forward.

"Yes," he said, stonily; "I meant it. And only for you," he cried, with new fire in his eyes and his voice, "I should have done it. Carroll, I am yours—your friend, your brother, your servant, your slave."

"All right, old man," said Carroll, shaking hands with him. "Say no more about it."

"Good," said Baretti. "I will say no more. But it is true, and I mean it."

It was good acting if he did not mean it. His eyes gleamed like black fire, and his lips quivered. When the two had parted, Tom reflected on the events of the night. and said to himself, not without satisfaction—

"I ought to have made a friend."

CHAPTER II.

THERE is a school of philosophers according to whose tenets it is easy to be philosophical. The aspirant to wisdom learns that there is little to be done but to set the basest construction on all human motives, and to believe and prophesy the worst in regard to all human actions. This royal road to philosophy has been pursued by notable people, and the man who travels by it is sure of certain obvious advantages. The clock that stands still tells the truth twice a day, and the mental attitude which never varies will find itself justified upon occasion. It is an axiom with the acrid school that if you do a man a service he will hate you; and, like many other axioms of many other schools it is true in some cases and false in others.

A man who takes another out of the streets of London and shelters him; who takes him out of despair and brings him home to hope again; who takes him from the dread of an ignominious finish to life, and gives him new chances of fame and fortune, does what few men have a chance to do, and may fairly be said to have deserved gratitude. Tom

had done an undoubted good turn to Baretti, but he had not looked for so volcanic a thanksgiving as the little man offered in return. Gratitude was not a sentiment, but a passion with this hot little Italian. His benefactor filled his thoughts as a dearly beloved mistress might have done. He deified him as young men in love deify their sweethearts. Tom Carroll was the noblest, the most generous, the handsomest, and the ablest man in the world to Antonio Baretti. For weeks after the artist's recovery from despair there were minutes when he laid down his brushes because he could not see his canvas for the moisture in his eyes, as he thought of the magnificent tender goodness of his best of friends and patrons.

My Lord Bellamy—a neighbor of Thomas Carroll the elder, in the country—had given Baretti a commission (of course through Tom's intercession), and Baretti was hard at work on a canvas measuring six feet by four, painting with prodigious ardor to the incessant sound of Tom's violin which came soaring from the room below. Thin cascades of scales, sonorous cascades of scales, sometimes a tune which made Baretti long to dance, and sometimes a plaintive air, which made the emotional little fellow long to cry—these sounds arose almost continually, for some six or seven hours a day.

"Be witness for me," the youngster would sometimes say to Baretti, quoting Mrs. Browning—

> "Be witness for me—with no amateur's
> Irreverent haste and busy idleness
> I wrought for art."

And then, being newly inspired, he would go back to his fiddling and saw sparks of light and laughter, or long sweet sighs of musical anguish, from the fiddle-strings.

You may believe that these were happy days for the rehabilitated artist. Such halcyon visions of fame as ardent young painters have were with him often, and were always sweetened by his gratitude and his resolve to show it and prove it to the world at large. He had promises within him of such a brotherhood in art as the world had never seen. Carroll could afford to work and wait for poor art's sake, and would be hailed some day as a great composer and the king of fiddlers, and Baretti himself was going to vault straightway into fame by the painting of this one

picture. And when they were both great men, and the painter was in the very ripeness and zenith of his day, he would go down to Tom's country mansion and enrich its walls as mortal walls were never enriched before, with color and sweet form. And they would be friends forever, with no possibility of a wrinkle on the face of the young cherub of friendship who smiled so dearly now. A good little fellow, with a fine exaggerative heart and temperament, chockful of gratitude, and love, and hope, and an ambition nine tenths unselfish.

Master Tom, though not quite the paragon his southern *protégé* believed him, was worthier of this unstinted admiration than often happens, and being himself of a generous, open nature, and having done the Italian so brotherly a turn, he was of course immensely fond of him, and interested in his successes. So these two lads of five-and-twenty loved and admired each other loyally—the one with a shy sentiment and a purposely roughened outside to it, and the other with a downright openness of declaration which embarrassed while it pleased. The artistic enthusiasm of the one spurred that of the other, and they slaved away with ardor at their respective pursuits. Tom saw much less of the fashionable world in these days than he had been used to see, and with the constant labor to which he gave himself, made real progress in his difficult art.

Cousin Mark was a frequent visitor at Tom's chambers, where he smoked Tom's havanas and drank Tom's claret, whilst he listened with his own cynical grin to Baretti's encomiums on Tom and Tom's encomiums on Baretti. The painter was not merely rescued from seediness of apparel, but being provided with the wherewithal by his moneyed friend, had blossomed into outrageous sartorial gayeties which somehow seemed to suit him. Tom had lent him in all a hundred and fifty pounds, and since Baretti was to receive three hundred for his picture, he bore the burden of the money debt with patience. He wore a velvet sack to paint in, and was generally to be seen in-doors in a gorgeous smoking-cap, and slippers in the hues of sunrise dyed. Certain valuable meerschaum pipes, confided to the care of mine uncle (to whose doors the artist had found the mournful road a month before) were in his own possession again, and one of these always gave a fitting finish to the picture he presented.

Cousin Mark was not burdened with more money than he knew what to do with. His uncle—Thomas Carroll the elder—was not disposed to be over and above liberal, and Mark's profession of barrister was so far absolutely unremunerative to him. Cousin Tom, on the contrary, had plenty of money, having inherited a few loose thousands from his mother, and being in receipt of a comfortable additional allowance from his father. Tom's position from Mark's point of view was enviable.

There are two or three sorts of envy, only one of the kinds being criminal. But—not to beat about the bush—Cousin Mark's envy of Tom Carroll had a little of the criminal tinge in it. Mark had carefully trained himself into the belief that human goodness was a sham, and that nothing was done by anybody without an eye to the *quid pro quo*. Uncle Thomas gave him an allowance. Good. He flattered Uncle Thomas, and believed himself expected to do so. Cousin Tom was ridiculously generous. Well, money was cheap with Cousin Tom, and to the absurd order of mind, it was worth money to be called a good fellow, and to surround one's self with sycophants. Mark begged from the father and borrowed from the son, and was properly sycophantic, with an undercurrent of cynical humor in his service, and an affectation of manly bluntness which more than redeemed him in his own eyes.

Now Mark had a mania for getting at the bottom of things, and from the first hour when he had seen his cousin and Baretti together their connection had puzzled him a little. Calling one evening he found Baretti alone and, quite unnecessarily, began to pump him.

"It's rather odd, Signor Baretti," said Mark, "that you and I should never have met until a fortnight ago, since Tom and you are such friends."

"Ah!" said the Italian, with a bright and tender smile. "We are old acquaintances, but the friendship is a new one. The friendship began the night you first met me here."

And eager to exalt his idol, the painter began to tell the story. He related with profuse Italian action the history of the count's wickedness, and he portrayed his own misery and despair. He acted the part of Tom Carroll in the Strand, the compassionate, the generous, the good; he enacted his own part at that memorable interview also,

sparing in his description no breach in his boots or tinge of yellow on his frayed shirt-collar. He brought his hero and himself into the very room in which he told the moving story. He cast himself anew upon his knees and buried his head in the arm-chair in illustration of his own abandonment to sorrow. He sprung to his feet and spoke out of his chest in imitation of the admirable rescuer's cheery manner. There were tears in his lambent soft eyes as he lauded his preserver and swore fidelity to him.

London is pretty thickly provided with human contrasts, but it would not have been easy to find two young fellows wider apart in thought and feeling in all London's limits than the man who told and the man who heard this story. Mark listened with interest, and was even not without admiration. He admitted that—in the Italian style of art—Baretti's was a very fine performance. He thought that he had never seen the cynic's definition of gratitude so well illustrated. To say that he doubted the genuineness of Baretti's protestations would be to do Mark an injustice. He was certain in his own mind that the little man was a liar and a pretender—like other people. Only, he lied and pretended better than the rich, being an artist and having command over what were called the emotions.

To Baretti's affectionate soul such an injustice as Mark did him would have seemed impossible, even if he could have been brought to understand the mental condition which created it. Not to have been grateful would have been prodigious, and all his southern soul was given to his preserver.

"Where the carcass is," said Mark to himself, "there will the vultures be gathered together. If there were plenty for both I suppose no two would waste time in pecking at each other. But this Italian vulture is a big-beaked fellow—a fellow with an appetite. A hundred and fifty is a good-sized first mouthful; and a mere flap of the wings won't scare that harpy. I must dig him in the ribs, and pretty keenly. The British bird was only just in time, a fortnight ago, to secure a morsel one third the size of the foreign bird's mouthful."

Whilst he entertained these reflections Mark was pleasantly conscious of his own cynical humor and his own cynical candor. Curious, how if you show any man his face in the glass, he is not displeased with it. Execrable

singers chant for their own amusement, and like their own voices. It is conceivable that the skunk esteems his own odor highly, and would have a poor opinion of eau-de-Cologne. And, quite as a matter of course, Cousin Mark thought his own mental attitude admirable. If he had the penetration to see through Baretti's humbug, he had also the honesty to admit the truth about himself. And it would not be true of him to say that he began to hate the little painter. Active sentiments of any kind did not come to him easily, and life, though a warfare, was to be gone through with no more passion than was necessary. There are men who would skewer you if you could not otherwise be got out of their way, and if it were safe to do it, without mercy, and without rage—just at the bidding of a cold hunger for your share of things—and Mark Carroll was of them.

It is one of the vulgarest errors in the world that men are unhappy in proportion to the narrowness of their sympathies. The garroter's conscience is the cat-o'-nine-tails.

When Mark came to look at it fairly and squarely, he saw how difficult, if not impossible, it would be to separate the two friends. He tested Tom and found him full of the most ridiculous belief in the genuineness of Baretti. Mark did not doubt that Tom laid the flattering unction to his own soul in all sincerity.

"My cousin Tom," said Mark to himself, "is fool enough for anything."

But in due time Baretti's picture was finished and paid for, and before its transfer to my Lord Bellamy's country seat, was on view at one of the Pall Mall galleries. It made some noise in the world of art and brought a commission or two.

On the day on which Baretti received his check it happened that Mark and Tom sat together in the latter's room. Enter the painter in his dark purple velvet, his smoking-cap and slippers—a perfect study in color.

"Good-day, Mr. Mark Carroll," cried the little man, with a beaming countenance. "Good-day, Mr. Tom Carroll." He fluttered the fortunate piece of paper in one hand and executed a fantastic *pas seul*. "That," he said, clapping the document on the table and bringing down both palms upon it resonantly, "is the check of my Lord Bellamy for three hundred sterling pounds. Aha! it is

addressed to Antonio Baretti, Esquire, and Antonio Baretti, Esquire, has written his famous name of European celebrity upon the back of it. Observe, Mr. Mark Carroll, until the famous name was written upon its back that document was without value. By inscribing the famous name I create three hundred sterling English pounds. I venerate myself like a cashier of the Bank of England. More. I pay my debts, and I kiss the hands of the best of men, my preserver."

Before Tom had guessed what he was about, the painter was actually on his knees putting his words into action. The young Englishman blushed, and upset his chair in his haste to be out of gratitude's way. Mark looked on, smiling, with a smile that characterized the pair.

"Humbug and idiot!" said Mark's smile. Though Tom had run out of Baretti's way he looked at the little painter with gratified affection, plainly to be read through all his embarrassment. And in the fiery Italian's dark eyes there was a visible moisture.

"You be blowed!" said Tom, making a feeble shot at humor, and trying lamely to disguise his own pleasure. "Who asked you for the money?"

"Not you," said Baretti, with a happy and affectionate laugh. "Not you by a word or a look. He lends," he cried, turning to Mark, "with the magnificence of Mæcenas, and he waits for repayment like patience upon a pedestal."

"He does," cried Mark, his smile expanding. "If he can't see through this," thought Mark, "the beggar's too blear-eyed to see through anything."

"Rubbish," said Tom. "I'm very glad you have the money, Baretti, very glad. Pay me when you like."

"I like to pay you now," said Baretti. "Not—believe me!—not that it is a burden to owe you money" (Mark grinned outright at this touch of artiful simplicity)—"but because it is yet the greatest pleasure I have ever known." Tom looked at Mark, and Baretti caught the glance. "Your cousin," he cried, "is no stranger to this business. He knows what you lent me, and why you lent it." Tom looked at him with reproach in his eyes. "I could not help telling him," said the artist beseechingly.

"I ought to have told you, Tom, how affectionately Mr. Baretti spoke of you," said Mark, with commendable

gravity. The acting on both sides was really diverting to Mark, who believed in Tom's annoyance just as much as in Baretti's gratitude.

"Rubbish," said Tom, again.

"Sit down, Carroll," cried Baretti, "and write me a check for one hundred and fifty pounds."

Tom, with a little air of lingering unwillingness, obeyed, and Baretti, having acquitted his debt, executed a second fantastic *pas seul*.

"Will they take so small a sum as this at the bank?" he demanded by and by. "Then let us go and put it in straightway. Come. I will make myself fit for out-of-doors in a minute."

He darted away, returning presently attired in a velvet shooting-coat and a wideawake hat, and drawing on, with loving care and precision, a pair of lavender-colored kid gloves. He wore white gaiters over his little patent leathered toes, and carried a natty little cane-stick under his arm.

Mark, having no espeical business on his hands, accompanied Baretti and his cousin. Before they had gone a hundred yards, they saw, in a quiet street opening off Mantague Gardens, two people walking placidly toward them. The one was a stoutish, broad-shouldered young man, with a swarthy fat face, beady eyes, and a jetty mustache. On cheeks and chin he was blue with close shaving, and it was a hundred pounds to a penny, at first sight, that he was an operatic tenor and an Italian. The other was a gloriously caparisoned young woman, a pronounced brunette, with large, languishing black eyes, and extremely ripe, red lips, and a languishing gait, which was yet elastic. Her figure was inclined, but only inclined, to *embonpoint*, and Mark, who thought himself something of a connoisseur in female beauty, pronounced her a fine woman on the spot. Baretti beholding the approaching pair, who walked arm in arm with a tender leaning toward each other, broke away from his companions and made a dash at the swarthy fat man, whom he hailed in voluble Italian and kissed vehemently on both cheeks, standing on tiptoe to do it. Next, with much ceremony, he saluted the lady, and the swarthy man was heard to murmur,

"Signora Malfi."

"This," said Baretti, turning to Tom and Mark, "is

my famous countryman—like myself, of Naples—Signor Malfi. Il Maestro Thomas Carroll,'' addressing the Italian.

"Rubbish,'' said Tom, for the third time that morning, but he bowed to the swarthy Italian and the radiant young woman, whilst Baretti introduced Cousin Mark. Cousin Mark, finding that the stranger's stock of English was extremely limited, addressed him in Italian (of which tongue he was complete master), thanking him, with many courteous flourishes, for the delights which he (the swarthy, fat man) had given Mark at Milan, and Naples, and in London. Signor Malfi took all this like a man who was used to it, but he was nevertheless pleased to find an Englishman to whom it was no trouble to talk, and he set out at once in the open street with a vivacious history of the villainies of one Corditi, a miserable wretch who presumed to consider himself a rival. All this was Italian to Tom, who was relieved when he saw Baretti shaking hands with the tenor and preparing to leave him. But there was still a little delay. The wickednesses of the rival tenor had made some explanations necessary to a provincial theatrical manager then in town, and Signor Malfi begged Baretti to accompany him and translate.

"Signor Baretti,'' said Mark, in the operatic tenor's own tongue, "is a busy man just now, and I am an idle one. I am entirely at your service.''

"You of the family of Carroll,'' said the painter, "are all alike. Generous and obliging to a fault.''

Mark smiled in answer. The Signora Malfi was a singularly fine woman, and Mark had nothing to do. And, besides, the briefless barrister was one of those people who always find it worth while to know theatric and operatic people. One got stalls in that way at times, and to a man who is bound to be seen in the world, and who has no great resources of his own, that sort of thing is worth angling for. The singer was not unwilling to accept Mark's good offices, and Mark insisted on proffering them, with almost overwhelming politeness. So it befell that Baretti and Tom went one way, whilst Mark and his new acquaintances went another in pursuit of the theatrical manager. The signora's face and figure, and the signora's conversation had so many attractions for Mark that, when the manager had been visited and the singer's honor—on which he ap-

peared to set some value—had been cleared, he consented to dine with his obliged friends, and accompanied them to a restaurant in Prince's Street, where garlic was the staple of half the dishes, and the *chianti* was excellent.

Here were other gentlemen with stoutish, broad-shouldered figures, swarthy fat faces, heavy eyes and jetty mustaches, who were also blue with close shaving on cheeks and chin. With most of these Signor Malfi was on easy terms, and they shouted at each other from their different parts of the room, and gesticulated at each other with amiable ferocity across the little oblong tables on which the meal was served. The signora was the only person of the gentler sex there present, and Mark observed an absence of restraint in conversation which argued the lady of an indulgent turn.

After dinner the company drank coffee, clustered at one table, and smoked cigars, called Virginian, priced at twopence and measuring nine inches in length, and finally three or four of the swarthy, fat men started with Signor Malfi and the lady for their apartments, Mark keeping their company still. All the men pausing in the middle of Wardour Street to shout together, in the absurd belief that they were discussing something. Mark politely offered his arm to the signora, and at an easy pace walked on.

CHAPTER III.

Thomas Carroll the elder was a justice of the peace, and chairman of the guardians of the poor. He owned half a village and some two thousand acres of land in a Mid-England county.

To be a land-owner is not, of itself, to be uncommon. A justice of the peace is not necessarily higher than the angels. There are chairmen of boards of guardians, even, who will never set the Thames on fire. But to be Thomas Carroll was, in the very nature of things, to be a remarkable man.

When people differed from Mr. Carroll, as they sometimes did, he displayed surprise and pity. In politics he was a Tory, and it was a habit of his to say that he could only conceive of an opponent as a fool or a knave. In either case he knew how to tolerate. A large nature is always lenient.

To have bought him at his own price and sold him in open market would have broken the Bank of England. In his affable way he condescended to everybody, and was mightily proud of having so little pride. As befitted his sense of his own majesty he was tall and portly. He was bald to the crown, and he came out in photographs as a man with a lofty forehead. His iron-gray hair was crisp and curled, his cheeks were rosy, his hands were large and very plump and white. In dress he was a trifle old-fashioned, and he wore but one jewel, a big rose-diamond which gave opportunities for the display of his handsome fingers.

Trench House, his residence, dominated Overhill and looked down upon it from a turfy, well-timbered slope which faced southward—a big, squat building in mellow red brick, not very picturesque, but looking home-like and dignified in the midst of its trees and lawns and gardens. Within easy view of its front windows there stood (and for that matter still stands) a gray old farm-house, which was tenanted by a yeoman whose forebears had once owned the land about it. These people had fallen bit by bit from their prosperous estate, and had parted bit by bit with their possessions, and now for a generation or two they had farmed the land more or less unsuccessfully. One Michael Moore, the first of the family of whom any record had been kept, had been an Ironside. His sword and his iron head-pot were preserved in a high state of polish and glitter above the mantel-shelf. One George Moore had served two years in the county jail as a physical-force Chartist, and his memory was also cherished. The existent Michael Moore was proud of these bright spots in the family head-roll and was an uncompromising Radical. In the struggle for the repeal of the corn laws the existent Michael had made his name a stench in the nostrils of supporters of the agricultural interest, and had been looked upon as an Achan in the agricultural camp. He had had painted across the front of the farm-house (so that his Tory landlord might read the legend whenever he looked out of window) "peace, retrenchment and reform," and the letters were dimly traceable even now. Perhaps if Michael had devoted himself to farming with the ardor he threw into politics he might have prospered.

On a certain misty autumn afternoon, Mr. Carroll,

mounted on a handsome hack, jogged comfortably along the road which led from Trench House to the farm, and sighted a little crowd about the building. Remembering suddenly the occasion of this gathering, he would fain have turned back again, but he knew that he must have been observed already, and so held on. The crowd was made up of the people of the village, with here and there a stranger, and standing in a wagon in front of the house with a table before him was a man in a white hat who held forth noisily.

"Any advance on twelve ten? Twelve ten! A high-class heifer, sire and dam both known! Really, gentlemen, really! Thirteen? Thank you, Mr. Jones. Thirteen! Any advance on thirteen?"

The last link between the Moores and their old homestead was broken, and they were going away.

As Mr. Carroll, with raised hat in answer to many salutations from the farm-yard, was jogging by, there came from the yard-gate a man with a florid complexion and white hair.

"So you've come to see the last of us, eh, squire? You'll be easier in your mind when we've gone, no doubt."

"I am afraid the village will not be sorry to lose you, Moore," returned the landlord. "But you will have the goodness to remember that this is none of my doing." He waved his hand toward the yard, from which they were hidden by the corner of the building. "I can but feel that I have been forbearing as a landlord, not merely in the matter of rent, but in respect also to the farm, which has considerably deteriorated in value of late years."

"Well, squire," returned the other, "you've little enough to grumble over. As to the rent, you'll have it to the uttermost farthing; and as to the farm, it's been treated better than it deserves. It's a sour, poor land, and always was, and always will be. But I don't want to have any bad blood between you and me."

"My good fellow—" began Mr. Carroll, with a tolerant wave of his hand, and a smile of tranquil amusement.

"Whatever I've said again you has been said as a public duty, and not again you as a man," pursued the farmer.

"You do me some injustice, Moore," said Mr. Carroll, with his tranquil smile. "I don't know what you have said; I don't care at all what you have said. I am sorry

to destroy any dream you may have cherished, but it is a fact that you have never troubled me, except by your mismanagement of the land."

"I know you're tough enough in the hide," said the farmer, "but I thought I might have pricked you once or twice. I don't think you're a bad sort at bottom, though you'll find out more than you know about the land when you begin to farm it, as I'm told you're going to. But I'm going away, and I want to do it friend-like. I've got nothing again you, squire, barring politics, and I'm not averse to shaking hands, if so be that you are willing."

"Very well, my good fellow," said the squire, leaning downward and proffering two fingers of his right hand. The other two were needed to hold the gold-headed riding-whip.

"I don't want two fingers, squire," said the out-going tenant. "I want a hand if I have anything."

"Very well, my good fellow, very well," said Mr. Carroll again, smiling outright this time. "I wish you well, Moore, and if you desire to give my good wishes effect you will drop those foolish political notions of yours and give your time and your thoughts to business. A man in your station has no business with politics."

"All right, squire," said the farmer. "I've said already as you're not a bad sort at bottom, and I'm glad there's no ill-blood between us. Good-bye."

"Shall I see you again?" asked Mr. Carroll, with twinkling eyes and his clean-shaven lips twitching. Mr. Carroll was fond of musing on the subject of human egotism, and Moore's display tickled him rarely.

"No," said the farmer. "Woolley is lawyer as well as auctioneer, and he's got a full list of my debts. He'll pay 'em all; the rent among 'em. So this is good-bye in earnest."

"Good-bye, Moore, good-bye. And take my advice about the politics."

With that the squire rode away, still calmly amused. It was noticeable that most men's estimates of Mr. Carroll tickled him. Almost everybody, with the exception of people of the lowest class, spoke to him as they spoke to anybody else. He had frequent cause to smile at human insolence, but to have been ruffled by it would have been too absurd. He jogged along in a splendid placid content-

ment until the railway-station was in sight. At some expense to himself and some inconvenience to the village, he had insisted that the railway-line should not approach his house too closely. It was a branch line and a small affair, which so far paid no dividend, and Mr. Carroll had become a large shareholder in it in order to save his property from desecration. A train was puffing along, lazily enough, the steam ascending on the heavy autumn air in straight columns and lingering about the fields. At the station-door was the solitary fly the village boasted, and standing near, apparently giving directions to the driver about a heap of luggage, was Thomas Carroll the younger, in company with a small man who looked like a foreigner. Mr. Carroll put up his gold-rimmed double eyeglasses to be sure of his son's identity, and rode forward.

"How do you do, Tom? How do you do? I had not expected you until to-morrow."

"I said the twenty-second," answered Tom.

"And this," said Mr. Carroll, "is the twenty-first. I had ordered Baker to meet you here with the carriage. The same unmethodical Tom as ever."

"I wondered nobody was here," said Tom with a laugh. "Father, this is Signor Baretti. My father, Baretti."

Mr. Carroll bowed in good-humored condescension.

"The—the artist?" he asked, putting up the gold-rimmed glasses.

"Yes," said Tom. "You remember his picture at the Academy—'A Saturn After his Fall'—with a line from Keats, 'Deep in the shady sadness of a vale.'"

"'Deep in the shady sadness of her veil,'" said Mr. Carroll. "Of course. I remember distinctly. You are welcome to Overhill, Mr. —er—"

"Baretti," said Tom.

"You are welcome to Overhill, Mr. Baretti," said Tom's father, "and welcome to Trench House. I am superior," he added, with a charming smile and a reassuring move of the right hand, "to the absurd prejudices which animate so many members of my own class with regard to yours."

Baretti bowed with commendable gravity, but there was a twinkle in his handsome Italian eyes which seemed to bespeak an inward sentiment of mirth.

"I thank you, sir," he said breaking silence for the first time.

"I am probably right in presuming," said Mr. Carroll, with cheerful affability, "that Mr. Baretti is not a native of this country? Ah, *Signor* Baretti! Of course—of course! An Italian, Signor Baretti?"

"I am an Italian, sir," returned the painter.

"I know nothing more absurd than national prejudices," said Mr. Carroll, genially. "An Italian is as welcome at Trench House, Signor Baretti, as an Englishman. A man of large nature is cosmopolitan."

Baretti bowed again, not feeling called upon to say anything. Tom hid his embarrassment among the luggage, and his father, with an expression of the pleasure it would give him to meet Tom's friend at dinner, rode on again.

"Take these things up to the house," said Tom to the driver of the fly. "We'll walk, Baretti." The painter cheerfully assenting, they went on together. In a while Carroll turned upon his companion with a laugh half shy and half sly: "Well, Baretti. Isn't he pretty nearly as good as I told you he would be?"

"I do not like," said Baretti gravely, "that a son should speak lightly of a father."

"No, no," cried the young Englishman, with a blush. "He's a splendid old fellow, is my governor. I never knew a better man. But he *is* a little pompous. That's his only fault. He's a trifle pompous."

"He *is* a little pompous," Baretti assented with much gravity.

"But you mustn't be offended by him," said Tom.

"I shall not be offended by him," returned Baretti, with a look of almost canine affection at his companion.

"I wanted to walk," said Tom, not without something of an air of haste to be rid of the subject, "so that I might show you some of those ready-made pictures I spoke of. There. That old farm-house is one of them, though this is an unfortunate day for looking at it, because the mist shuts out the distance. This is the real point of view, over the stile here. It's a little muddy, but a landscape painter in search of subjects won't mind that, I dare say."

The landscape painter in search of subjects seemed to hang back a little. It was not the mud which made him linger, as Tom discovered when he turned. A girl with a

graceful figure and attired like a lady came walking in the direction of the stile, most unaffectedly crying as she walked.

"Dear me, Miss Moore," cried Tom, vaulting into the field and approaching, hat in hand, "you are in distress."

The girl, in answer to this obvious statement, looked up and blushed and started, then paled and looked down again.

"I was saying good-bye to the old place, Mr. Carroll," she answered, simply. "I didn't know that any one was near."

"Are you going away?" asked Tom. "We shall be sorry to lose you."

"Yes," the girl answered, suppressing a fresh burst of tears. "Everything was sold to-day, and we leave to-night."

"God bless my soul!" said Tom, fatuously.

"The farm has not been paying for a long time," the girl went on, "and father resolved to sell everything and go to London."

"To London?" asked Tom in amazement. "What on earth is a farmer going to do in London? I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to be impertinent. But all this is such news to me."

"He means to start a dairy there," the girl explained. "Won't you go in, Mr. Carroll? He will be glad to see you."

She mounted the stile without Tom's assistance, and pulling down her veil led the way to the house. Baretti had walked on a little, and Tom in passing asked to be excused for a minute. The farmer, with an unconcerned, if not a very cheerful look, sat by the fireside smoking. The room and the walls were absolutely bare, and the chamber wore a wretched and dismantled aspect.

"How d'ye do, Mister Thomas?" said the smoker, rising with a hearty greeting. "Sit down, sir—sit down. There's nothing but the chimney-settle to sit on, for we're clearing out to-day, but *you* won't mind that, I know."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Tom. "Isn't it very sudden?"

"Sudden!" said the farmer, with a grim laugh. "It began in *his* day." He looked upward to the spot on which the Cromwellian soldier's sword and head-piece had been used to hang. "He owned the land, and he was the first

that ever raised money on a foot of it. And, saving your presence, we've been going to the devil ever since, at greater or lesser speed, and, at last, here we are." He waved a hand to indicate the bare walls and floor, and laughed again. "But at last, Mister Thomas, I've shook that four-hundred-acre incubus off the family shoulders, and I feel my own man again. The missis takes on at going, and so does Azubah, but I've done the right thing, and though it's a bit of a wrench, when all's said, I'm glad I've done it."

"Then there has been no quarrel with my father?" Tom asked.

"Your father?" said the farmer, with a much more cheerful laugh. "I don't believe the Old Enemy himself could quarrel with your father, sir. He'd no more dream of quarreling with me than I should of harboring a deadly spite again a mouse. He's too lofty for it; I put it to him this afternoon, scarce an hour ago, 'There's no ill-blood betwixt us, squire,' says I. Why, I saw him laughing at me, at the bare idea of my having the cheek to think I was big enough for him to think about."

"Come, come, Moore," said Tom, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Oh, that's your duty, sir, and I'll say no more," returned the farmer. "And I'm glad to know you come in time to see the last of us. The two houses, so they do say, fowt on different sides in Cromwell's time, but we've been good friends and neighbors since, and I'm pleased to part at peace. Well, sir, here's the cart at the door, and we've got the train to catch. It's a short welcome for the last time, Mister Thomas, but it'll always be a good one so long as there is a roof-tree over Michael Moore's head. So, good-bye, sir, and God bless you!" He shook hands with Tom, wringing his hand harder than he knew, and bustled to the foot of the stairs. "Here's Jack ready with the cart, missis, and Mister Thomas is here to say good-bye."

The farmer's daughter stood in the middle of the dismantled room, and Tom Carroll, looking at her, felt grieved for her. He had played with her when he was a child, and he had known her all his life.

"I am sorry you are going," he said—"very sorry!" He held out his hand, and she laid hers in it languidly.

He felt a little awkward and clumsy at this, for he had meant a farewell shake-hands, and the girl's fingers gave no sign of a responsive grip. So he stood feeling foolish enough for perhaps ten seconds, and that, though not a long time under most circumstances, is more than long enough to feel foolish in with any degree of comfort. In spite of his discomfiture, however—and he was always shy with women—he could not help looking at his old playmate, and it came into his mind with something of a shock—what a pretty girl she was! Not in the conventional way, perhaps, but what splendid, soft brown eyes, what a sensitive mouth, how graceful a figure, what a pretty curve in the neck and shoulders, while the sad head drooped and the brown eyes looked up tearful and artless like a baby's! Yet the girl was eighteen if she was a day, and old enough to have known better than to look at a young man in a fashion so embarrassing if only she had thought about it. It was sufficiently evident that she thought of nothing just then except the sorrow of going and parting, unless it were, perhaps, the altogether acknowledged and unconscious comfort of having her hand in a friend's, and that friend a man.

Whatever embarrassment the situation held was on Tom's side only, for Tom was conscious, and the girl was not. A sudden step and a voice at the door promised relief, but in effect made matters serious.

"Azubah," cried a young lady, entering suddenly, "how dare you try to go away like this without letting me know of it?" The new-comer kissed the girl exuberantly, and made a cold and rather too sweeping courtesy to Tom, who blushed fierily and fidgeted with his hands and feet. It was noticeable that until the entrance of this new figure the farmer's daughter had worn a look of pretty refinement and delicacy; but in the radiance of the new-comer, and by contrast with her exquisite finery, the girl's prettiness dwindled into plainness, her refinement took an immediate rusticity, and her dress looked poor. Nobody would have said that the new-comer was overdressed, but everything she wore was rich and fashionable, and she herself had the art of wearing clothes to perfection, and she moved and looked like a princess—like a princess in a tale, that is, and not absolutely like the real thing, which is sometimes (treasonable as it may sound to say it) dowdy.

"I wrote to you, Miss Lording," said the farmer's daughter, "and sent the letter to the post an hour ago."

"You are a wicked girl," returned Miss Lording, kissing her again vehemently. "And as for you, Mr. Moore," turning to the farmer, "I think you most unkind to allow Azubah to go away without saying good-bye to me."

"Now come, Miss Lording," said Moore, with a jocose and waggish air, "*you* ought to know better than say that; you know what sort of a life you lead *your* father, a-riding rough-shod over all his orders, and I know what sort of life my girl leads me. When I'm as dead as paternal authority is, I shall be ripe for burying."

"Here is another criminal," said Miss Lording, turning severely toward Tom. "You might have told me, Mr. Carroll."

"Like yourself, Miss Lording," said Tom, "I only learned the news this afternoon. I have just arrived from town."

"Where are you going, Azubah?" asked the young lady.

"We're all going up to London, miss," said the farmer, "and Azubah will doubtless write to say when we're settled, where we are. But here's the missis, and the cart's waiting, and it's good-bye all round."

He shook hands with overdone bustle and flourished his hat at the door behind his departing wife and daughter, leaving his guests behind him. Perhaps in spite of the gayety of his manner he was aware of something in his eyes which might have told how the old farmer felt on uprooting himself from the soil on which his yeomen ancestors had grown and flourished. The latest comer followed, holding up her skirts from the dusty floor, and the bedraggled yard; and Tom, hat in hand, went after. The farmer bustled the women into the dog-cart, mounted in turn, took the reins, and drove off. His wife and daughter, who faced backward on the old place they were leaving, began to cry and to wave pocket-handkerchiefs in token of farewell. Miss Lording and Tom responded, and when the cart had passed the corner of the lane the lady turned to her carriage, which stood at the farm-yard gate in charge of an old coachman of extremely grave and responsible aspect. In place of ascending, as Tom expected, she turned back again.

"I am sorry," she said, "to have interrupted your leave-taking, Mr. Carroll, but," she added with a shrug of the shoulders and a dazzling smile, "the door was open, and it was not my fault."

"Don't mock me always," Tom besought her, miserably. She laughed outright and clapped her hands.

"You look deliciously sentimental, Mr. Carroll. Is that a friend of yours? Who is he? He looks odd and attractive, and as if he were somebody."

"My friend Baretti, the artist," said Tom.

"Baretti!" she answered. "Was it he who painted 'Saturn'—'Deep in the shady sadness of a vale'? Oh, Tom, I am sorry I teased you. And you always do know such nice people! Bring him here."

Tom bowed delightedly and ran after Baretti.

"I want to introduce you to Miss Lording, Baretti," he said when he came up with him. "She wants to know you. Your Academy picture impressed her greatly."

They returned together, and the little artist being presented, the queenly young lady said many pleasant things to him, and finally drove away, leaving the two young men standing in the lane with the mist closing about them, and feeling very much as if a summer sun had suddenly vanished from the skies, carrying all his warmth and brightness with him.

"Carroll," said the painter a minute later, in his vehement Italian way, "I have beheld my ideal of all feminine grace and beauty. What splendor! what grace! what charm!"

"Yes," said Tom, in an oddly grudging way. "She's very pretty, isn't she?"

"*Gran Dio!*" cried the painter, casting his arms wildly upward. "He professes to have a soul, and he calls that vision of beauty—very pretty!"

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Carroll the elder and Mr. Carroll the younger sat together that evening after dinner. Baretti had retired ostensibly to write letters, but really with no other object than to leave father and son alone to talk over any matters they might have in mind after a separation of a month or two.

"And what are you doing with yourself in London, Tom?" asked the father, sipping at his wine.

"Fiddling," said Tom, lightly, "painting, writing."

"Things have changed since my day," said Mr. Carroll, not without a tinge of sorrow in his tones. "The occupations of which you speak are now the recognized relaxations of a gentleman. I suppose the change is a part of that progress of which we hear so much, and though I am far from admiring it, I can see that it is beyond individual control. You belong to your new generation and I belong to my old one, and we shall not convince each other." He sighed complacently, and drawing a gold snuff-box from his pocket, tapped it, opened it, closed it again, and put it back without using it. This was a habit with him. It probably comforted him with some old-world notions of a time when gentlemen had distinctive little customs of their own which had not descended to the lower classes. "There are some practices," he resumed, "which are likely to be conserved even in these days of social decadence. And—*à propos*," he added with a smile, "when do you think of getting married?"

Somewhat to the elder man's surprise the younger one blushed at this query.

"I am glad you've mentioned that subject, father," said Tom with a smiling embarrassment.

"Aha!" said Mr. Carroll with stately geniality. "Who is the lady?"

"Well," said Tom, blushing more deeply, "I have seen a good deal of her in town, and we have known each other a long time and—it's Miss Lording. I haven't said a word about it until now, but—"

"You think you understand each other?" asked the father.

"No," cried Tom. "I don't think she dislikes me—but—"

"Miss Lording," said Mr. Carroll, producing the gold snuff-box again and going once more through his pretense of preparation, "Miss Lording is a young lady who would ornament any sphere and do credit to any household. She is handsome, well-bred, well-connected, and well-to-do." Tom's diffidence did not extend itself to his father, and the elder man's estimate of Miss Lording as his son's future wife was in a second loftier than any opinion of her he

had previously held. When anything or person became in any way an appanage to the splendors of Thomas Carroll the elder, it was beautified at once by the halo which to his own eyes always dwelt upon him. "I am growing a little tired," he continued, "of my duties as justice of the peace, and when you are married and settled down I shall be glad to see you succeeding to your father's functions. I have fulfilled that duty now for a quarter of a century, not altogether without credit."

"I am glad to have your approval," said Tom, bashfully. It was difficult as yet to talk even to his father on such a matter.

"Your mention of that topic leads me," said Mr. Carroll, "to a subject of some importance which affects myself. When I asked you to bring down your artistic friend, I did so with a purpose. You spoke very highly of him, and I am told that in regard to such matters your judgment is to be trusted. When a gentleman undertakes a public duty he does not look for a reward, but it is possible that either by length of service or by the exercises of an unusual ability he may secure some recognition. I have received a letter signed on behalf of my colleagues on the bench by Lord Bonnamy. In that letter I am informed that at a recent meeting of the county justices it was unanimously resolved—unanimously resolved—to invite me to sit for my portrait to any artist of my choice. It is proposed to preserve the picture," he added with composed magnificence, "in the Shire Hall itself. The act, as you will observe, is spontaneous, and I will not disguise the fact that it is of a nature calculated to gratify me."

"Assuredly," said Tom; "a very high compliment indeed." He was not quite as well pleased with the news as if it had come at another moment.

"Your friend Baretti is thoroughly competent to the task?" inquired Mr. Carroll.

"Competent!" cried Tom. And he began to praise Baretti much beyond his merits, which were great. His father being willing, the enthusiast ran to his friend's room and brought him down-stairs. Baretti began at once to regard Mr. Carroll with a critical and observant eye, and to move about him so as to get various views of him, in so much that the subject began to think the artist disrespectful.

"I have never found time to devote myself to the study of the fine arts," said Mr. Carroll, by and by, "although I am not one of those who regard a knowledge of the minutiæ of those pursuits as being unworthy of a gentleman. But my interest, although it has found but a casual expression, has been consistent, and I have often thought that when one calls to mind the gratification it affords to future generations to look upon the lineaments of one who has been esteemed in his day and generation, one is tempted to invest the portrait-painter with an almost factitious importance, and to identify him with his theme."

"Yes," said Tom, with a laugh, "one may say more than that sometimes. Look at that glorious collection of portraits of old nobodies at the Musée Plantin. I dare say somebody knows their histories, but if Rubens hadn't painted them nobody would have cared to know whether they had lived or died." He had said all this in one eager burst, before he had time to think that it was not quite complimentary to his father. "You must do your best to immortalize my father, Baretti," he added, uncomfortably.

This view of the case was new to Mr. Carroll, but it was his habit to ignore things which seemed to work against his own conceptions of himself. He looked at Tom with an allowing smile, but gave no further expression to his thoughts. People frequently had opinions of that sort, and it was scarcely worth while to interrupt them. He put the finger-tips of both hands together, and addressed Baretti, as if unconscious of the interruption.

"It is unfortunate that our list of reliable portraits of eminent men is so small. We have, for instance, no reliable representation of the greatest of English poets. And when one reflects that it was within the power of any inconsiderable number of inconsiderable people to offer him such a requisition as that of which I am the honored recipient, one is the more regretful and the more surprised." Mr. Carroll warmed with his theme, and continued: "What would we give for a portrait of King Solomon, a reliable likeness of Alexander, of Bruce, or of Alfred the Great?" Nobody offering to appraise the value of these lost blessings, he paused awhile, and then, rising from his seat, unlocked a drawer and took from it Lord Bonnamy's letter. He put up his gold eyeglasses and read it through, holding it at arm's-length, then folding it, he resumed his

seat, and, tapping the paper against the eyeglasses, and gazing serenely at the fire, he said, "I shall certainly accede to the request of my fellow-justices."

The talk drifted, and no further allusion was made to Tom's matrimonial prospects. The young fellow, who was not much of an egotist, and never very disposed to be exigent about his own affairs, felt yet a little hurt at the fashion in which his father had shelved the theme. An only son's marriage might have seemed, he thought, at least as interesting as even the flattering request of the country justices. Tom went to bed a little depressed and disheartened, but the topic near his heart found a renewal next morning.

Breakfast was just over. Mr. Carroll was reading the "Times." Tom was standing at the fire, and Baretti was in another room, setting up an easel and generally preparing for the beginning of the new commission, when a knock sounded on the door of the breakfast-room. Tom called, "Come in," and a servant entered, bearing a card upon a salver.

"Show Mr. Lording this way, Johnson," said Mr. Carroll. "Your arrival is auspicious, Lording."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the new-comer. He threw back a pair of broad shoulders and showed a set of white teeth as he laughed. "Polly saw Master Tom yesterday, and I've just come round to see him. How's London, Tom? And how's the *magnum opus*, the opera? And why is my arrival auspicious, Carroll? Eh?"

There was nothing surprisingly comic in this speech, but the speaker laughed so heartily after it that he might have uttered the happiest of *bon mots* and been less pleased.

"Sit down," said Mr. Carroll, "and I will tell you."

"Gad!" said the visitor, sitting down, "you look as solemn as if Calcraft wouldn't act, and they wanted me to play the part of sheriff in good earnest. What's the matter?"

"It's scarcely so terrible as that," said Tom, who felt sure of the father, at least, whatever the daughter's opinion might prove to be.

"The fact is, Lording," said Mr. Carroll, addressing himself to his visitor with a ponderous gravity, "Tom and I were last night discussing a matter of the utmost moment to his welfare. I had asked him—without any ex-

pectation of a definite answer—whether he had as yet any ideas upon the marriage question. To my surprise, he mentioned your daughter."

"Eh?" said the old gentleman. "Why, she's a baby. And you're no more than a boy, Tom."

"I am five-and-twenty," said Tom defensively.

"Then, by Jove!" said Lording, "she's more than nineteen, for you weren't six when she was born. Gad, how time flies, eh, Carroll?"

Mr. Carroll regarded his guest with an eye which seemed to convey a tolerant rebuke to flippancy.

"I should have approached you with more ceremony—" he began.

"Ceremony be hanged!" cried Lording. "I never was more surprised in my life. But if Tom wants the girl to marry him he must ask her. And if she will, she must; and if she won't, it's of no use to ask me to do anything. And I wish you luck, my lad, and I hope, if the little girl says yes, that you'll be happy."

"The match would meet with your good-will?" inquired Mr. Carroll.

"Seriously," said the guest, with a visage suddenly grown solemn, "I am pleased and proud." He laughed a second later, "What sort of luck you may have—Tom, my lad—I can't even guess. But I dare say, you rascal, you know all about that already. Eh?"

"Indeed, sir—" Tom began in tones of protest.

"You don't?" cried Miss Lording's father. "Gad, sir, your old dad and I knew our way about a little better than you youngsters seem to do. Didn't we, Carroll?" He threw back his square gray head and his big shoulders, and laughed prodigiously, and made a motion to dig Mr. Carroll in the ribs.

"I am happy," said that gentleman, evading Lording's fingers, and speaking with much gravity of manner, "that the proposal meets with your approval."

"Well," said the guest, beaming, "it's a matter for Polly to settle, I suppose, and if she says yes, I don't see who's to prevent it."

There was a knock at the door. "Come in," cried Tom. "My friend Baretti, Mr. Lording."

"Good Lord," cried the old gentleman, with another great laugh, "*Absit omen! Absit omen!* Glad to meet

you, Mr. Baretti. My daughter spoke of having met you with my friend Tom here, and I promised myself the pleasure of making your acquaintance. I'm a plain countryman, Mr. Baretti, of the old school. I don't know much about art, but I have the sense to reverence, even where I haven't the brains to understand. My daughter is a judge of that sort of thing, and speaks of you in such terms, sir, that I am proud to meet you."

He kept the artist's hand in his during the whole of this address, and when he had finished he laughed with much heartiness, though what (except his own high spirits) he had to laugh at was not obvious.

"Mr. Baretti," said the master of the house, "has been so good as to consent to paint my portrait."

"I did not know," said the Italian, "that you were engaged. I came to say that I was ready."

"You don't mind my looking on?" asked Lording, with boy-like eagerness. "I've never seen anybody painting except my daughter. "I suppose, now," he asked, "you paint in oils, don't you?"

"In this case," said the artist, "yes."

"Is this the picture for the Shire Hall?" asked Lording.

"The picture for the Shire Hall," assented Mr. Carroll, with tranquil majesty. "The present," he added, "is the only time at our disposal. We will begin now, Mr. Baretti, if you please."

Mr. Carroll, being marshaled by his three attendants to the room assigned, was set in a proper light, and being bidden to turn his head a little in such a way, and to lower his chin a little in such a way, to fold his hands in such a manner, and to settle his shoulders in such another manner, was a spectacle the like of which, for lordly condescension and regal obedience, is not often to be seen. The little Italian prowled around him with stealthy step and watchful eye, taking note of his proportions and his lines, and looked so much at the moment like some velvet beast of prey about to spring that Mr. Carroll experienced uncomfortable sensations.

"Is not the canvas rather small?" inquired the sitter.

"All the portraits in the Shire Hall are kit-cats," answered Tom. "This is the same size."

"Kit-cats!" said Mr. Carroll, as if he tasted the word

and disapproved of its flavor, "what is meant by kit-cats?"

"Sit still, if you please," cried the painter. "Now," a moment later, "you can move as much as you like."

The sitter was silent, if only from sheer amazement. A minute or two later he laughed.

"You gentlemen of the brush," he said, "have something of a royal way with you when at work."

"My sitters have told me that before," said Baretti. The rebuke passed over his head. Mr. Carroll began to dislike the little man and his ways.

Lording looked on with great interest whilst Baretti painted, and Tom bore himself as well as he could, though he felt a little sore at the neglect of his affairs. In about two hours' time Baretti, who painted with great rapidity, had upon the canvas a foggy resemblance of his sitter's form and features, with a sort of mud halo about the head.

"That will do for to-day," he said, throwing down his brushes and stretching himself. "The fire is out."

Mr. Carroll rose solemnly and inspected the work. "Do you detect a likeness, Lording?" he asked doubtfully.

"It's wonderful," said Lording, "really wonderful." He turned to Baretti with almost an air of reverence: "My girl paints very prettily in water-colors," he said, "but I never saw any one paint in oils before. It's really very remarkable—very remarkable."

"You set me at liberty for the rest of the day, Mr. Baretti?" demanded Mr. Carroll stiffly.

"Yes," said the little painter, languidly; "while the fire is alight I work. When it goes out I have done. I could not do anything more to-day even at a portrait."

"Why *even* at a portrait?" asked Lording.

"Oh," said the little man, lighting a cigar, "a portrait is not often so—what is your word?—so demanding?—no—that will not do—a portrait does not often draw you on like a picture of your own choosing. You can put it away without sorrow, and you can work at it without joy."

This as relating to portraits in general might be true enough, but Mr. Carroll began to have the meanest opinion of the painter's intellect.

"Well," cried Lording, with another of his great laughs at the end of the statement, "I've a ride before me and something to do when I get home. Eh, Tom? Ha! ha!

ha! You come over this afternoon, Tom, will you? Eh? Ha-ha-ha-ha! Good-morning, Tom. Good-morning, Carroll. Good-morning, Mr. Baretti. I'm very proud to have made your acquaintance, sir. See you this afternoon, Tom. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

He went out in a storm of merriment and Mr. Carroll retired with him, leaving Tom and Baretti together. Tom, with a flutter at his breast, went out of the room to avoid the necessity for talking, and the painter sat still for a time and smoked. But by and by he displaced the canvas from which Mr. Carroll's ghostly presentment stared at him, and set upon the easel a small panel on which he began to sketch with a bit of charcoal, touching here and there with such a wandering hand that an onlooker might have been puzzled to guess the meaning of the lines. But in a few minutes these lines all began to grow together, and in a few minutes more they resulted in a beautiful feminine face. The artist, having regarded it attentively, took up a duster, rubbed out the drawing, and began again. This time the beautiful feminine face came out as Miss Mary Lording's undoubted image, and the painter, resuming his seat, smoked tranquilly as he regarded it with half-shut, meditative eyes.

About five minutes later a step sounded in the corridor and a hand was laid upon the handle of the door. The painter rose and rubbed the beautiful feminine face from the panel, almost with a feeling of detected guilt. He would have been troubled to guess why he had destroyed the drawing, and perhaps still more troubled to say why he felt guilty, but the face had been haunting him oddly ever since he had seen it, and was present in his mind with a curiously irresistible demand to be reproduced in visible form.

The intruder was the master of the house, and he, after one questioning look about the room, bowed in silence and retired. Baretti listened to his footstep as they traveled toward Tom's chamber, which was in the same corridor, and then began to sketch anew. The same face came out upon the panel, and once more he dusted it away, and this time with a look of resolution as if he had done with the theme, he put away the panel and set up the damp, gleaming ghostly presentation of his host again. Then he walked restlessly about the room, and next sat down at the table

and began to sketch the view from the window, but his thoughts strayed off, and before he knew it, there was a pretty hat in outline on the paper, and below the hat a charming face with an escaping curl or two upon the forehead—Mary Lording to the life again. He tore the paper with an exclamation of impatience and left the room.

Now this might mean a good deal or it might mean nothing—nothing, that is, but an artistic fancy and an artistic preoccupation. Ardent young artists are wont to be haunted by shapes of beauty, and Baretti was likelier to be impressed by form and color than another man. But artists are a good deal hardened, too, in the matter of feminine charms, which, in their case, strike the eye with singular vividness, but leave the heart untouched; and if a painter fell in love with all the owners of the beautiful faces that dwell in his memory and ask to be painted he would have his hands full. Yet the little Italian went about perturbed in spirit, and thought more of Mary Lording's face than was good for him.

Tom left him alone after luncheon, with no explanation of his errand, and Baretti made more sketches of random themes. The face crept into them all, and at last he resigned himself to the pleasure it gave him. His hand became so familiar with it, and his memory preserved it so clearly, that he drew it in all the varying expressions he had seen upon it, until he began to long to give it color, and yielded to the longing. Before twilight fell he had painted a delicate little picture in water-color, slight, but very true and fine, and after staring at this until he could see it no longer, he put it away in his portmanteau and burned all the pencil sketches he had made.

CHAPTER V.

Papa Lording, riding home in the brisk air and sunlight, turned over in his mind the proposal young Carroll had made for his daughter's hand. He was a bluff and hearty man of a type common amongst English country gentlemen; had a rare good heart, a magnificent digestion, and as much mental polish as the fiber of which he was made would carry. He sucked marrow of mirth and laughter out of things at which most people do not even

smile: and this was not because he was a humorist, but because his nature was of that downright sunlit sort which is probably only to be found among Englishmen. He had not the remotest idea as he rode that he was going to be involved in a love story at all out of the common. Here was a handsome young fellow, well connected and well-to-do, who had taken a liking in the ordinary fashion to a charming young woman of nineteen, also well connected and well-to-do. The pair would probably be married, and Papa Lording would very well have liked, in the manner of his own earlier day, to have danced at the wedding.

The old gentleman confessed to himself, as he had confessed to the suitor an hour or two before, that he was without voice in the matter. His daughter drove him, and if it were only with a peacock's feather for whip, and a thread of silk for rein, he was none the less bound to go the way she wanted.

At the sound of hoof-beats in the avenue, Miss Lording ran from the room in which she sat into the hall, and there awaited her father. Rival charms are rarely so equally balanced that some girl or other has not the right to be called the belle of her part of the country, or the beauty of her county. Miss Lording had that right, and was probably aware of it. She was undeniably English in style (the loveliest style, as I make bold to believe, in the world); she had lovely eyes, a face of charming contour and expression, a wealth of hair of fine texture and glossy hue (her own), and a figure neither too ripe nor too fragile, too tall nor too dumpy. Her vivacity of spirit lit up those beautiful eyes with a constant variety of expression, and set that charming figure in a constantly varied and delicately graduated series of postures, so that she avoided all seeming of monotony without running into that opposing sin of jerkiness which is the snare of many lively young ladies, who, without it, might be charming.

Her father, having dismounted, surrendered his horse and ran up the stone steps which led to the hall. His genial British face and genial British heart were alike aglow, and alike a little tenderer than common. There was not much romance in the good old gentleman's nature, but the love stories of the young sometimes awaken memories in the minds of the middle-aged, and he had been thinking on his ride with unwonted warmth and gentleness

of the days of his own youth, when he himself went a-courting. So the kiss which commonly celebrated his return from an absence of whatever brevity was multiplied into three, one for the dimple on each ripe cheek, and one for the charming lips between them.

"Polly," said the old gentleman, with twinkling eyes, "I have brought a little present for you."

"Yes!" said the young lady, "what is it?" Her father, with one arm round her waist, led her to the room she had quitted a moment before, and there turning faced her squarely. "What is the matter, papa?" she asked. "Why do you look at me so oddly?"

"Well," said papa, "the present I have to offer you (and it isn't mine) is an article which is supposed by good judges to be worth a great deal. I have seen such a thing described in print as a perfect mine of jewels. I've been told that it's a sort of talisman to make a good girl happy all her life long, provided that she doesn't lose it. I've actually known one or two cases in which it has really done as much. But all the same, I'm not quite certain whether you'll care to have it."

"You mustn't be a ridiculous old gentleman," said his daughter. "What is it, dear?"

Perhaps in a general way she guessed the nature of the proffered gift, for she blushed slightly.

"It's a young man's heart, my darling," said the old fellow, "warranted sound and whole, and rising five-and-twenty."

Miss Lording began to take a close and serious interest in the pattern of papa's watch-chain.

"Has the young man a tongue as well as a heart, papa?" she asked. "And should I know his face if I saw it?"

"You'll see it this afternoon," said the old gentleman. "And then you can judge for yourself."

"Am I to say 'Yes' or 'No' at once?" she asked, looking up at him saucily. "Or may I wait till I see the heart's owner?"

"You had better wait," he said, patting her cheeks affectionately. His voice was husky at that moment, for he saw quite suddenly a house that looked most mournful and empty, and himself going about it solitary. The girl answered to his thoughts:

"Send the young man's heart back again, papa. It is no honest gift, but a bait."

"Don't you ask to know whose it is?" he demanded.

"Young men don't give their hearts away for nothing," said Miss Lording, still busy with her father's watch-chain. "The young man has designs, and I have penetration enough to guess them. Send the wicked present back again, papa. I am happy without it."

"Don't you ask to know whose it is?" he asked again.

"No," she said, in a tone of mighty indifference, and wound the watch-chain about one of her white fingers with an air of elaborate interest.

"Very well, my dear," said the old boy with a sigh. "If it isn't to-day it will be to-morrow. The poor lad will be here this afternoon to take his present back again —a little cracked I'm afraid."

"Who is it, papa?" she asked.

"I thought you didn't want to know, you rogue!" cried her father with a laugh.

"But I have a right to know, sir, if I choose," she answered, with a pretty mock defiance.

"It's young Carroll," said her father. "I shall have to give you away to somebody some day, and I could part with you to him as willingly as to anybody." The girl was blushing, and even trembling a little, by this time. "But if it's settled, and you won't have anything to say to him—" Some slight change in her posture, something in the droop of her head, perhaps, or something in the nervous action of the fingers toying with the watch-chain, stopped him. "Is it 'Yes' or 'No,' my dear?" he asked, putting an arm about her neck.

"I don't know, papa," murmured the young lady.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, "think it over, my dear, and decide for your own happiness." He kissed her and left her a little sadly, feeling somewhat like a criminal whose repeal has been granted and snatched away again. "These youngsters," he said to himself, with half a sigh and half a laugh, "come gayly enough to steal an old man's treasure. But Tom's a good lad—a good lad."

Girls are known to be quick at sounding the affections of young people of the opposite sex when the affections concern themselves, and it is likely that Miss Lording was

not very much surprised at hearing Tom Carroll's name at the end of her father's little parable. There was nothing to dislike in the young man. He was tall and straight, and handsome and well-bred. He was reputed for a good-hearted fellow, and he was popular with all sorts and conditions of men. It would not be difficult to like him very much.

Now, this is not the language of ardent passion, but (Juliet and all manner of poetic precedents to the contrary notwithstanding) ardent passion is not altogether a pretty thing in a young woman to begin with. There are plenty of exceptions, of course, but the ordinary marriageable love of the ordinary marriageable young Englishwoman begins with liking and goes on in tranquil growth, finding deep root without the influence of storm, and learning to flourish, fair and calm and broad, in a tolerably equable temperature.

Whether his daughter were as yet in love with Tom Carroll or not, whether she simply liked him, or had already passed over the boundary line between liking and loving, was a problem too delicate for a man of Papa Lording's blunt discernment to solve. But he felt pretty sure that the girl would say "Yes" to Tom's question, and he was lonely in anticipation. The time seemed to drag with him until the lover came. Tom Carroll's heart beat higher than usual as he rode along the trim avenue and surrendered his horse at the door. The old boy received him with more than common cordiality.

"I know nothing about it, Tom," he said, "but you have my best wishes. I don't authorize you to tell her so, mind, for she must make her own choice quite freely."

"I understand you perfectly, sir," said the youngster, a little proudly. "I don't think I should care to marry any woman, however dearly—however highly I might esteem her, unless she took me of her own free will."

"Quite right, Tom," said the other; "a very proper spirit. But don't you think you'd rather—have it over?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Tom, with a dry little laugh, "I should like to know."

"Come this way," said Lording, and Tom followed into a small, cheerfully furnished sitting-room, in which Mary sat alone, making busy pretense of doing something with a needle. "Tom has ridden over, my dear," said her father

with a most transparent pretense of having nothing on his mind—"ridden over to have a look at us. I'll just leave him here for a minute whilst I go and—"

He had no excuse ready, and therefore slid away without one, leaving the young people together.

"Have you deserted your friend Signor Baretti, Mr. Carroll?" asked the young lady.

"Yes," said Tom, hurriedly plunging *in medias res.* "I have come over with a very special object. I do not know whether your father has spoken of it."

"A special object?" said the young lady, surveying her labors with a head set sideways and an air of exasperating want of interest in his communication.

"I can't hope to tell you how much in earnest I am," said Tom, "or how much depends to me upon this interview." He paused and looked at her. She was surveying her needle-work again with eyes of elaborate innocence, and he felt discouraged. "I am here," he went on desperately, "to ask you to be my wife."

Miss Lording bent over the elegant trifle upon her lap and gave it a yet closer scrutiny. Tom waited, and she said nothing. The silence began to grow extremely awkward. Some young men in an enterprise of this kind are easily abashed, and Tom Carroll was one of them. The longer the silence continued the harder it was to break it, and he felt cold and miserable.

"Have you no answer for me?" he said at last.

"I don't know," said the young lady demurely—"until—I am asked." Tom Carroll marched across the little room, planted a chair by her side, and sat down in it with an air of terrible resolve.

"Will you?" he asked in a whisper, "will you be my wife?"

"Don't you think, Mr. Carroll," she answered, picking up the bit of needle-work to examine it more closely, "don't you think that this is a little—precipitate?"

"Why," cried Tom, "we have known each other all our lives."

"I have not had any experience in such matters," said the young lady, "but I have always understood that there were preliminaries to a question of that sort."

"Oh," said the youngster, "don't jest with me, Miss Lording. Don't laugh at me. It is death to me, if it is

sport to you.'' He took the needle-work trifle from her and possessed himself of her hands. "Tell me," he murmured.

"What?" demanded the disingenuous young woman, with averted countenance.

"Tell me you love me."

"For shame, Mr. Carroll, to ask a poor girl to say such things!"

"Will you be my wife?" said Tom, growing bolder every moment.

"I don't know," she answered.

"You don't know how I love you," said the courtier, with a hand in each of his.

"No," she said, "that is true. I have never been told."

"Shall I tell you?" said he.

"Thank you," she answered, with infinite dry demureness, "I should like to hear it very much."

"I can't," said Tom. "There are no words for it. I love you with all my heart and soul—but that seems to say nothing. I think," he went on, blushing and stammering, "that you are the most beautiful woman in the world."

"That is very nice of you," said Miss Lording, tranquilly. She was so exasperating that, though he never knew how it came about, Tom took her in his arms and kissed her over and over again. Perhaps that was the true way with her, and in any case (even if it were not that masterly method of wooing that won her) it was then that she was won.

"For shame, Mr. Carroll!" she cried, with face and neck and ears all rosy with blushes; "it is well to have a giant's strength, but tyrannous to use it like a giant. Let me go."

"Not until you promise," cried the lover. "Will you be my wife?"

"If you insist upon it," said the young lady. "But a promise under compulsion is no promise."

Tom released her, and dropped upon one knee before her like a wooer of old days.

"Will you promise now?" She bent over him with mirth and tenderness.

"Do you wish it very much?" she asked.

"With all my soul," he answered, taking her hands again. "Will you promise?"

"You will be good?" she demanded.

"As gold," said the young man.

"Then release me." He dropped her hands, still kneeling before her, and she took a step backward. "I promise," she said, and whisking the door open, she skimmed from the room like a swallow, leaving her lover with hands that grasped at air. But the young fellow rose with a glad heart and went in search of his divinity's father.

"What news, Tom?" the old fellow asked.

"She accepts me, sir," said Tom, blushing, "but she has run away."

"No compunction in your heart, Tom?" said the father, shaking hands with him "No remorse for robbing an old fellow of his only treasure, and leaving him lonely? Eh?"

"You set a bad example, sir, some thirty years ago," said Tom. Lording exploded in one of his great ringing laughs, but there were tears in his eyes all the same which were not altogether born of laughter.

"She's a good girl, Tom," he said, "though I say it. A good girl. And if she's as good a wife as she's a daughter, you'll have a treasure. But one word, my lad. You mustn't run away with her yet awhile. I must have time to get used to it, and to think it over. Now, Tom, you've done your business—ride away and tell your father. Yes; I turn you out of doors, like a wicked father in a novel. Go away, lad, and tell the old fellow to get ready to lose his son, whilst the other old fellow gets ready to lose his daughter. You'll see her to-morrow. She wants to see your friend painting, and I promised to bring her over. Good-afternoon, lad, and God bless you!"

Tom went unwillingly, but he went. Pleasant thoughts were his companions as he rode homeward. Arrived, he told his father of the prosperity of his suit, and submitted to a lengthy dissertation on the responsibilities of married life. After dinner he sat with Baretti in the room set apart as a temporary studio, and listened pleased to the little man's animated chatter. There was a fire at one end of the room, and the Italian stood rubbing his hands over it, cigar in mouth, and basking in the cheerful glow.

"This is better than St. James's Park, Carroll," he said at last. Tom's outer ear caught this statement, but his mind was deaf to its meaning. He was thinking of Mary, and he answered mechanically—

"Yes. I suppose it is more comfortable."

"Ah, my friend," said Baretti, who was liable to be run away with whenever he mounted this theme, "it was not that I was hungry, and had no food. It was not that I was cold, and had no fire. But it is terrible to despair, and I despaired when I met you. There is nothing I have in the world, there is nothing I ever shall have which I do not owe and shall not owe to you."

"Look here, Baretti," said Tom, "once for all, I won't have it. It was a bargain between us that that time should be forgotten."

"It shall be forgotten," cried Baretti, fiercely, "when I grow to be a hound and a scoundrel. It shall be forgotten when I lie and rot in my dishonorable grave. But not an hour before. And I have no way to repay you. You want for nothing. There is nothing I can do for you."

"Stupidest of men!" said Tom; "you have repaid what I lent you, and there is an end of it."

"What did you lend me?" cried the artist, flinging his cigar into the fire. "A handful of dirty money which you did not want, and which was nothing to you because you did not want it? And what besides? Nothing but hope when I despaired; nothing but my belief in men, which I had lost; nothing but my power to work, which had left me! If I am happy, and can hope again, I owe it to you. If I reach to fame and prosperity, as I shall, the fame and prosperity are yours by right, not mine. And you want for nothing, and I can pay you nothing."

He declaimed every word of this harangue with vivid passing and superabundant gesture. There were tears in his dark eyes when he closed, and he fawned upon Tom almost as an affectionate dog might have done.

"What shall I do for you? How shall I pay you? If you shall come to me one day and say—'For my service surrender everything, Fame, Ambition, Hope, whatever is dearest to your heart,' do you think I would not do it? You made me, and you own me."

"All this is madness," answered Tom. "You don't

know how it hurts me to hear you talk like that. Now, my dear good fellow, don't say any more."

"I know," said Baretti, with a curious darkness clouding his face as he spoke, "but you may live to prove me."

"Now, there you are on a wrong track again," said Tom. "I don't doubt you. I only say that you exaggerate to the very height of absurdity a very simple service. If your own idiotic quixotic pride had not been in your way, a thousand men would have done as much for you."

"Aha!" cried the little painter, with outstretched hands. "But where were the nine hundred and ninety-nine? It was you who did it, and you can not escape from it; and I will be grateful, if you were to kill me for it. I have never," he added, with a ludicrously sudden return to the tones of commonplace, "I have never admired that stolidity of character on which you English pride yourselves. Ariosto's fable is true. God found one day a lump of gold, and he wrapped it in lead and cast it upon the earth, and that was the English people. And you have been ashamed of the gold, and proud to show the wretched lead ever since." He was in a great heat of scorn by this time, and flung the moral of his fable at Tom's head as if it had been a challenge to mortal combat. But in another second he had veered to his old manner. "Why can not I do anything for you?"

"Well, look here, old man," said Tom, with something like an inspiration, "since I am such a burden to your soul, you *shall* do something for me. Something I shall value so highly that even you, seeing how I prize it, shall admit that we are quits."

"I do not think that," said Baretti; "but tell me what it is." There was such a look upon him as Curtius, his countryman, might have worn when he leaped into the gulf.

"It's nothing-mad brained or heroical," said Tom, with an embarrassed laugh. "I want you to paint a portrait—that's all."

"Yours?" demanded Baretti, eagerly.

"No, not mine," said Tom.

"Whose?"

The young fellow returned no direct answer to this question. He asked in turn—"You don't know why I went out this afternoon?"

"No," said Baretti, with a wondering look at him.

"I went out," said Tom, making a pretense of lighting his cigar, "for the express purpose of making—a proposal of marriage."

"And you made it?" cried the painter, taking him by both arms.

"I made it," said Tom.

"And the lady said 'Yes,'" cried the little Italian. "And it is her portrait that I am to paint. Thank you! Thank you! That is kind indeed!"

"Yes," said Tom, thawing somewhat at his companion's fire. "I want a portrait of the only woman I ever cared for, painted by the hand of the dearest friend I have in the world."

"Ah!" said Baretti, vehemently. "Do you mean that? Do you mean that?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I mean it." And in all real honesty he had long since begun to love the little man to whom he had done such a service.

"It shall be," said the painter, with a beaming face, "the dearest pleasure of my life, and I will paint as I have never painted before. I will paint like Murillo, like Raphael, like Titian—I will paint like the master of them all." He went striding up and down the room, and then suddenly pausing, seized Carroll by both hands. "I am forgetting. My dear, dear Carroll, with all my heart and soul I congratulate you. I wish you happiness and long life. Do I know the lady?"

"You have seen her," said Tom, laughing, and blushing, and shaking hands. "You saw her yesterday, and I introduced you to her."

Some new emotion knocked at the painter's heart, a sensation never felt before, swift and keen and painful. Carroll, in his pleasant embarrassment, was not looking at him, and the change in his face passed unnoticed. Baretti dragged his hands away from Tom's grasp and walked the length of the room.

"What men you are, you English!" he said, in a tone so curious that it struck the other strangely. "You said she was a pretty girl." He laughed, and Tom thought the laugh an odd one. "A young man is in love. He is not a common young man, but an artist, and he has written music that makes me believe he has a soul. And one day

meeting the goddess of his dreams, he can turn to a friend who loves him, and say she is a pretty girl. You are beyond me. I give you up. I have no understanding for you.'' Then he flashed back into his own fiery and enthusiastic tones, "But I will paint her portrait—the beautiful English girl, in the freshness and the grace of her young womanhood, with the face of a kind angel and the figure of a queen. Ah! I will paint a picture.''

"I thought it would please you," said Tom, simply.

"I congratulated you when I did not know," said Baretti. "Give me your hands again. Both hands. So. I know now, and I congratulate you again with all my heart and soul.''

Tom laughing and blushing again shook hands once more, and the theme dropped. The friends parted early, and the painter in his own room took out the work of the afternoon from his portmanteau, and after looking at it fixedly for a long time, set the edge of the paper to the light of his candle, and burned it slowly into ashes.

"Carroll," he said softly, in his own tongue, "there is no slave in the world who belongs to a master as I belong to you. You made me, and you own me. I am all yours, now, and till I die.''

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Carroll the elder was not a man to put any light he might have under a bushel, and finding out by and by that it was a creditable sort of thing (or was so esteemed by those who surrounded him) to have an artist of Baretti's capacity on his premises, he took to showing him a good deal. Mr. Carroll's world heard as much as enough of Mr. Carroll's portrait, and the painter sometimes worked with a little court of county admirers round him. He became extremely popular with the county ladies, and might have had his head turned if he had chosen to believe one-twentieth part of the flattering things they told him.

There are some spiritual maladies which can only be cured by being absolutely unmeddled with and left out of thought. Grief and hate and unauthorized love all belong to this species, and a man or woman who tries continually to discover how far the malady is abated or in-

creased is out of the way to a cure. To examine the passion is to feed its egotistical wish to be examined and thought about, and so to nurse its growth. Every passion is in itself supremely selfish and exigent, and there are few that can not be starved into subjection by the mere coldness of neglect. Poor Baretti awoke to the conclusion that he was near to envying and hating his friend, and with all the desire in the world to escape from that terrible precipice of wickedness, he could not resist the temptation to hover about it, to ask himself how near he was—how much nearer he might go—without falling over; how much longer he could stay at the edge before the heart-vertigo he dreaded should prompt him to throw himself headlong. To drop simile, and get back to plain dealing, he examined himself continually to see whether or not he were in love with his friend's sweetheart, and found (as a natural consequence) answers within himself which became more and more dangerous to his peace.

Human nature is so hopelessly complex and contradictory that it is even possible that, but for Tom Carroll's attachment to Mary, and the painter's passionate desire to be faithful to his friend, Baretti might never have seriously fallen in love with her. He began to dread himself and to fear an admiration which, but for his fear of it, might have ended as a score of others had done before it. He did not begin to hate his friend, for so much wickedness could not find room in a heart so filled by simplicity and loyalty, but he did begin passionately to love his friend's affianced lover. The thing was always in his mind, and he began to be very unhappy, and to be so afraid of loving that by mere force of contemplation he loved. He was wounded to begin with, and under constantly inquisitorial fingers the scratch festered and grew mortal. At last, there is the truth of the whole matter, and conveyed in a simile after all.

Baretti's portrait of his host was pronounced a fine work, alike by people who knew and people who did not know what they were talking about; and Mary Lording, who had seen the little man at work, and was more enthusiastic about his powers than anybody—being guided in that direction by her sweetheart's opinion, and going far beyond her leader, after woman's recognized fashion—was charmed at the idea of having her portrait painted by so

gifted a personage. The painter himself, in the contemplation of the task before him, began to wade in dangerous waters, and in a little while got washed off his feet altogether and was abandoned to the tide, on which he sometimes drifted deliciously, but oftener deliriously, and oftener still in poignant misery of spirit.

On a lovely autumn day, bright and dry, and keen with the breath of approaching winter, the accepted lover and his friend set out together on foot in the direction of Lording's house. Baretti's painting tools had been sent on beforehand, but there had been some little uncertainty about the day on which the first sitting should be given, and it was not quite a sure thing that the lady would be ready to receive them. Arrived at the house, they learned that she was somewhere in the grounds, and Tom, being not merely an accepted lover but an habitue of the place since boyhood, went out in search of her, taking his friend with him. The grounds of Lording's mansion were varied and extensive, and what with laurel-walks, rhododendron-walks, and walks sunken from the surrounding level to secure shelter in winter and shade in summer, there was ample opportunity for a game at hide-and-seek. In the eagerness of the chase Tom took the lead, and he was twenty yards in front of Baretti and at the end of a fine avenue of beeches, when he turned, and smilingly beckoned the painter on. The latter quickened his pace, and was just in time to see the smile of recognition and welcome which lit up Mary's face at the sight of her lover.

On the left side of the avenue, approached by a meandering path between two great trees, lay a secluded little dell. This dell being sheltered by the high foliage of the near trees, had kept for the most part a look of almost summer greenness, and the fiery hand of autumn had only kindled here and there a leaf. The moss which paved the place was a mere carpet of live emerald, and interlacing boughs above the lady's head made a sort of natural archway. This was the only hour of the day at this season at which the sun-rays could pierce the higher leafage, and the whole place was beautifully dappled with light and shadow. At the end of the vista revealed by the opening boughs, lay a patch of richly cultured garden, bright with color; and nearer at hand, just where the arched foliage ended and the garden began, was a little fountain, whose one lithe and

quivering jet sparkled in the sunlight, much as a gay melody sparkles on happy ears.

But the most charming feature of this charming spot was, of course, the girl who stood in it, smiling and radiant, like the day. Female loveliness is no doubt lovely in a cotton print, but when delicate fabrics of exquisite color have gone through the hands of an artist who knows his business, in days when fashion gives him a chance to be graceful, they can give beauty an extra charm. The dress she wore was simple enough to look at, but it became her almost subtly. She had been gathering flowers and ferns, and carried them in a basket in her gauntleted hands.

There is no disputing matters of taste, and there are no doubt thousands of men who, allowing the girl to have been beautiful, would have gone by without recognizing an approach to their ideal. It was enough for Tom that she was his, and it was more than enough for Baretti that she was his also.

"Can you give us a sitting?" asked Tom gayly, "Baretti is here and ready."

"I am here without doubt," said Baretti, "but I am not ready."

"No?" asked Tom, turning upon him, "why not?"

"I want this," said Baretti somberly, "to be a picture as well as a portrait. And I can not begin at once as if I were painting a house. Can I paint here to-day, Miss Lording?" he asked, "or shall I carry my things back to Trench House?"

"There is a room in complete readiness," said Mary, with a half puzzled look from Tom to the painter, "but I thought you said that you did not want to begin to-day."

"I do not want you to sit to-day," said the painter brusquely. "I want to sketch. I have an idea. Can I go?"

"Certainly," said the girl. Tom possessed himself of the basket, and they walked to the house together. Baretti did not speak until he found himself in the room set apart for him.

"I want to be alone, if you please," he said then, and began to push his easel about the room, and to raise and lower the blinds. "I do not wish to be disturbed until I have done what is in my mind. It is now eleven o'clock, and I can work till half past four. I shall have done by

then." He was very gloomy and quiet about all this, and Mary smiled at his exaggerated earnestness. Tom stayed a minute or two to chaff his friend, but meeting with no response, he left the room and took away Mary with him.

Being alone, the painter shut and locked the door, and taking a small mounted canvas, set it on the easel, he began to work. For half an hour his face of gloom grew darker and darker, and then his changeful nature set him on a new tack, and he began to work smilingly. Then in a while he was gloomy once more, but he worked all the time like a man possessed by an idea. It was not long before the idea began to declare itself. By swift and sure degrees there grew upon the canvas the figure of a girl who stood in a little green-floored dell, embraced by surrounding boughs and bearing in her gloved hands a basket of tangled ferns and flowers. The distant garden began to smile in the sun, and the green flooring of the dell to dapple with light and shadow.

There was a knock at the door and Tom Carroll's voice was heard outside.

"May I come in?"

"No," said the painter, without turning his head or pausing at his work.

"The bell has sounded for luncheon."

"I am not hungry," said Baretti; "I shall not come to luncheon. Leave me alone."

Tom retired, and the painter worked away. The face was merely indicated, and might have belonged to anybody or nobody, but the rest of the sketch had already something of a look of finish. Baretti lit a cigar and rested for a time, rising now and then to add a touch of color here and there. When his cigar was smoked through, he cast the stump into the grate and went on again. Not a bristle touched the canvas without definite intent, and he worked with prodigious rapidity and certainty, but with no hurry. The tints grew true, the eyes and lips began to smile, there came into the face beneath the magic kisses of the brush the very look of recognition and welcome he had seen four hours ago, the very figure looked as though it were about to move and to step from the canvas.

The artist looked at his watch, laid down his tools, and lit another cigar, pacing up and down the room as he smoked. Next, he sat and stared at his work from under

gloomy brows until he detected a fault somewhere and arose to amend it, and finding something else too lightly indicated, put in a masterly stroke or two of finish, and by these means became spurred into labor once again. The light was already growing dangerous to paint by when he finally laid down his palette and brushes and rang the bell.

"Tell your mistress and Mr. Carroll that I am ready," he said to the servant who answered this summons. The man retired obediently, and a minute or two later Mary and her lover and Papa Lording were heard laughing merrily together upon the stairs. Baretti stood back from his picture and stared at it solemnly with his hands in the pockets of his velvet jacket and his head drooping slightly forward, and in that attitude they found him.

"Man of whims," said Tom, "what is it? Mary! Mr. Lording! Come here. Baretti, you are a wonder of miracles."

The three stood before the work in amazement and admiration. Its effects were necessarily broad, but there was no hint of coarseness in its handling, and the colors were like nature's own. A rival painter might have discounted admiration a little, but there was no rival painter there, and the trio broke into unmeasured praises. The painter with his head still drooping forward and his hands in his jacket-pockets accepted their enthusiasm with an air of almost melodramatic gloom. He was genuinely unhappy now—more self-distrustful than ever, with more reason. He declined Lording's invitation to dinner, and in spite of pressure, went away alone to lock himself in his bedroom at Trench House, and brood over his own astonishing wickedness and the charms of his dearest friend's affianced wife.

"Baretti," said Tom, as he sat at the table with Mary and her father, "is a man of genius, and as everybody knows, men of genius have moods. I suppose he had worked everything out of him in that splendid inspiration, and felt fit for nothing afterward. Small wonder if he did."

His companions took that view of the case also, and not even the girl, as yet, began to suspect the truth. But, meantime, the little man was exceedingly bitter with himself, and yet, for his soul, he could not resist the ever-returning vision of the girl's face and figure. Though he turned it out of mental doors a thousand times, it came

back again, beautiful, smiling, unconscious. And he had vowed eternal faith and friendship to the man who had saved him, and who had an unassailable claim on all this loveliness. He tried to soothe himself by the casuistry natural to his surroundings. He could love without wishing to possess—but his heart cried out in indignation against that folly. It went through him like a knife when he thought of her in Tom's arms, and fancied Tom's kisses on her lips. At least, he could love and be quiet; but again, at the thought, the future seemed to rise before him like a blank wall. And the more he chafed and argued the more his fiery longing grew, till his southern blood, hot enough by nature, reached almost to boiling point, and he saw how dangerous he was growing. You may guess from what you know already that resolution was not his strong point. No resolute man would have gone under as he did on such poor compulsion, and if there was anything to save him now it must be something outside himself.

"After all," he said, "to die of thirst in the desert, whilst you watch your friend's only glass of water is a hard thing no doubt, but it is not stealing the water."

He sought whatever safeguard he could think of. Amongst them was the difference between Miss Lording's position and his own. Love her as much as he chose, even if she had been free, she would not have looked at him. Then, in face of that reflection, he began to dream of fame and fortune, and he saw himself as a new Titian, the acknowledged king of art in his own day, living in a house like a palace, and surrounded by social courtiers. But of all possible safeguards he felt that there was none like this friendship; and though his inward panegyrics on Tom Carroll were forced and less natural than they used to be, he had recourse to them and magnified Tom's service, and minified his own chances without that splendid friend and helper, until he began to experience a dawning sense of security. How could he be faithless to such a friend, even in fancy—even in a dream?

It was pretty late at night when Tom knocked at Baretti's door. The painter admitted him, and shook hands in silence. Tom was quite radiant and full of high spirits, and he must needs rally the small man of genius about his moods.

"What a droll fellow you are, Baretti! To-day, deeper sunk than plummet ever sounded; to-morrow soaring sky-high, and breaking your sublime head against the stars. But that's the penalty you pay for being a man of genius, and an Italian. Come into my den, my lion, and have a quiet smoke and a talk."

"Very well," said Baretti, with a more lowering face than ever; and having replenished his fire, and blown out the candles on the mantel-shelf, he followed. Tom's room was bright with firelight and lamplight, and its gay owner, talking voluble nothings, bustled about it, drawing curtains and pushing chairs near the fire. Talking still, he explored on his hands and knees the lower shelves of a locker, and arose with an aspect almost tragic.

"Not a spot of liquor in the ship!" he said. "Wait a bit, whilst I go and look up Johnson. The governor's in bed, and I don't want to ring."

Baretti nodded, and setting his arms on the mantel-piece, between the lamps that burned softly at either end, stared drearily at his own features in the mirror, without consciously seeing them. Tom Carroll was away so long that the little man forgot him.

"So," he said to himself, "this is the end of my pretenses of gratitude." It looked inexpressibly dark and ugly to him as he faced it in his own mind. "No, no, no. They shall not end in this way." As he moved with his Italian swiftness of gesture in answer to the movement of his soul, the motion was reflected in the mirror and drew his eye to the duplicate of his own figure there. He looked at it darkly for a minute, and shook a menacing finger at it. "You!" he said fierily and disdainfully. "You!" The reflection shook back at him a finger as threatening and as disdainful as his own. "I tell you," he said, "that you shall not moan about this, that you shall not admit to your own heart that it lives, that you shall carry it away and bury it, deep, deep, deep—do you hear?" The mockery of his features in the glass faced him and seemed to answer him, "I shall have trouble with you," he went on apostrophizing the reflection. "You will mock me and storm back at me when I storm. You can not be happy? You? Then it remains, my poor foolish friend, to be unhappy, and still be a man. And you shall be as unhappy as you choose, but you shall not have

one memory of a thought to curse you for having proved unfaithful."

Tom's foot kicked gently at the door, and Baretti answering to the summons, admitted his friend, who bore a bottle in either hand and one under each arm.

"Practicing for the stage?" asked Tom, laughingly.

"No," said Baretti, turning lightly round. "But I never shall be rid of my Italian accent."

"There is not much that is un-English in your accent," answered Tom, setting down his bottles; "but your action is altogether alien. You dart about like a parched pea in a pan. We English stand solid and lumpish while we speak. Now 'speak a piece,' as the Yankees say, and I will drill you. Something English."

"Danish will do," said the painter, with no responsive smile, and he declaimed with his arms hanging at his sides, and his whole figure stiffly set, "Give me the man that is not passion's slave." But here on a sudden he cast his arms wildly in the air and made a rush at the impassive Tom, crying—"And I will hold him in my heart of hearts —as I do thee!"

"Something too much of this," said Tom, completing the line, and shaking Baretti's hands away from his with a gesture that had nothing unfriendly in it. "This is less English than ever. We must train you by duller methods. Let us try the prosiest of prose to begin with. Repeat me one of Euclid's axioms."

"A straight line," said Baretti, marking the straight line in the air with a rapid forefinger, "is the shortest road between two points." And outstretched both forefingers at the end of the imaginary line, to illustrate the position of the points.

"You are hopeless," said Tom, laughing. "A man who gesticulates over Euclid will gesticulate over anything —over everything. I wonder," he added with sudden seriousness, "whether you southern people feel as keenly as you seem to feel. It seems to an Englishman—you don't mind my saying this, Baretti, do you?—that the Italian manner indicates—indicates— What's the word? Not insincerity?"

"No," cried the painter, almost fiercely, "not that."

"No," said Tom, holding out a hand to beseech quiet, "not that—but—a certain brevity of duration in sincerity.

A flash and over. An intense appreciation of anything and everything whilst it lasts. Your passions, fancies, likings, rages, are all like lightning. You live by lightning with the flash always coming and going."

Baretti shook his head.

"There is steady fire enough in an Italian's heart," he answered, with a somber nod, "to warm your hands at. I will give you another reason for the flashes you speak of. If you have a dull, steady, slow-burning fire, and you throw any trifle into it, any bit of stick or straw, you have a little flame which rises and dies. But you do not say that the fire is out, though it looks dull by contrast, when your wretched little bit of stick is finished. Human nature is human nature all the world over, only you show your emotions like an oyster, and I like a—like a—"

"Grasshopper," suggested Tom.

"That will do," said Baretti, with perfect gravity. "He is a sunny little creature who loves warm weather, and he moves briskly and he sings though his tunes are all very like one another."

"And yours are not," answered Tom; "for you are Variety's Epitome."

"There is no deep-rooted distrust of Italy in all this, is there, Carroll?" asked the painter, with a pretense of badinage. "What am I? A butterfly little fellow, eh? Fluttering, hovering, here, there, no staying, no resting, no stamina inside to make me want to rest and stay."

"No, no," said Tom; "I don't read you so badly."

"You do not think that I could not make my mind up to do a painful thing, which would take a long time, and be painful all the while?"

"No," said Tom, lightly enough; "why should I?"

"I do not want an answer of that sort," said the artist with a fiery sweep of his right arm. "Do you believe of me that for the sake of principle, or for the sake of a friend—for you, for instance—I would do something hard to do? That it is in me to do it? In a word, that I am a man of principle, and not an insect of impulse?"

"Granted," cried Tom, in some surprise at his companion's heat. "Granted, every word."

"You mean that?"

"I mean it."

"From your soul?" demanded the Italian, vehemently.

"I believe it honestly," answered the Briton, with genial stolidity.

"It will be better for me and for you," answered Baretti, "that you do believe it."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Tom, lightly. "Whisky or Burgundy, old man?" Baretti cast at him a glance of rage, and threw up his hands.

"Oh, you English! you English!" Tom laughed. Baretti was so much in earnest about trifles that Tom took nine tenths of his talk with a cent. per cent. dilution. In his inmost heart he thought an Englishman the only solid and responsible creature in the world.

"Carroll," said Baretti, "I am uncomfortable. I am in want of something, and I think it is music. Play something to me."

"All right," said Tom. "The governor's bedroom is on the other side of the house, luckily, I sha'n't disturb him." Tom took up his violin and began to play.

"Stop," cried Baretti, two or three minutes later; "I am out of tune. Your loveliest melodies caterwaul to me. I do not care for Mozart any more than if I were a Carib. Put it away, or play to yourself, if you will, and I will say good-night. Good-night, Carroll, good-night." Tom tried to dissuade him from going, but he stood with both hands outstretched, for a farewell, and a strange smile on his face. The player laid down his instrument and took both the outstretched hands in his, shook them, and dropped them gayly. The artist went without another word, and having locked the door of his own room and stirred the smoldering fire, he relighted his candles, and, with his elbows spread broad upon the mantel-piece, fell to staring at his own reflection. He had stood for a long time, when he murmured to himself—

"Not one base word of Carthage on my soul!" Then he suddenly blew out the candle, so that but for the glow of the fire the room was dark. "Good-night," he said softly, "good-night, Carroll. Best man and dearest friend, good-night. It is not the dog you fed who will bite you. It is not the heart you gave its only hope to that will envy you."

He sunk into a chair beside the fire, and watched the glow until it faded and died. Gray ashes were sprinkled, slowly, slowly, on the heads of faces in the fire, and glow-

ing features crumbled one by one until all had gone the way to dusty death, and he was staring blindly at the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT morning, when Mr. Carroll and Tom and Baretti were at breakfast together, Master Tom, who had a considerable little pile of letters before him, opened one of them, and suddenly rising from his seat, began to caper about the room and to sing and snap his fingers.

"Thomas," said Mr. Carroll, with a voice of displeasure, "pray compose yourself."

"Read that," said Tom, throwing the letter on the table, and stooping to right his fallen chair. "Isn't that magnificent?"

Mr. Carroll, with his gold-rimmed double eyeglasses on the bridge of his nose and his head thrown back a little, read the letter which had so delighted his son.

This pleases you?" he asked, when he had gone through it. He held the glasses in one hand, and the note in the other, and tapped them together lightly as he spoke. "This pleases you?"

"Certainly," said Tom, whose face was already much less radiant; "it is the greatest honor I could have hoped for."

"M-m," said Mr. Carroll, putting up the glasses once more. "I should scarcely have construed it so. You will answer the—ah—the gentleman who writes this in the affirmative?"

"Why, my dear father," said Tom, in a little dismay, "I never was so proud in my life. It's a letter from Hoffmann, Baretti," he went on, turning to his friend. "They're going to play my 'Dream of Venice' at Hoffmann's Wednesday Concerts, and Hoffmann wants to know if I will conduct in person."

"It is a splendid opportunity," said Baretti. "It is a high honor. I congratulate you, Carroll, with my whole heart."

Mr. Carroll drew out his snuff-box, tapped it twice or thrice, and put it back again.

"Very well, Tom," he said, handing back the note again, "I trust that I can rely upon you to do nothing

which will endanger my respect. You belong to your world and I to mine, and I suppose we shall not convince each other."

"There are to be two rehearsals," said Tom, who was so checked in the full flow of his spirits by his father's manner that he was fain to hide his embarrassment by a pretended reperusal of the letter, "and Hoffmann wants me to be present at them. The first is in a week's time. Shall you begin the portrait to-day, Baretti?"

"Yes," said Baretti, "to-day. You will come with me?" Tom assented, and the two finished breakfast in silence. Mr. Carroll betook himself to the library, carrying his letters with him, and before the two young fellows left the house they heard him ride away to attend some meeting of the justices in the neighboring town.

"I'll tell you what it is, Baretti," said Tom, "my father's a sort of survival. He is a man of the old school, and is slow to imbibe the modern feeling about art. You know how new that feeling is in England?" He was obviously afraid lest Baretti should feel in his own person the lash of Mr. Carroll's scorn of the artistic classes. The little man nodded back to him, with a singular smile, wonderfully affectionate and gentle.

"Yes," he replied, quietly, "it is hard to surrender the opinions of a life-time." He spoke with so little of his common vivacity that Tom noticed it, even in the midst of the preoccupation of his own annoyance. They were in the lane together on the way to Beech Tree Hall, and the artist was walking with his eyes upon the ground.

"What is the matter, Baretti?" asked Tom, with a hand on his friend's shoulder. "You are changed."

"I will tell you the plain truth," said the artist, pausing in his walk. "You must not laugh at me," he went on, looking upward, with a blush, "but I am homesick. It is three years since I last saw my native Naples, and then I stayed but for a week. There is nobody left," he continued, sadly, "but the place is there, and I must see it again and live in my own air for a time."

"That's natural enough," said Tom. "When do you want to go?"

"I shall finish this portrait," answered Baretti, "and then I shall go away at once."

"You won't stay long?" Tom asked.

"I can not tell," replied Baretti, "but I will promise one thing. If you will let me know when you are going to be married, I will come back in time."

"A bargain!" said Tom, gayly.

"A bargain," echoed the painter, "very well." A fortnight in the poisoned sunshine of her presence and then blank darkness. In all ages young men and young women have found love's dream look thus real and thus life-like.

Tom told his good news to his sweetheart and her father, and found ready sympathy and congratulation.

"But, Tom, my lad," said Lording, drawing him on one side, "what's going to become of the portrait? You won't take Baretti with you? When you are gone he'll be lonely. Let him come over here. I'll ask two or three people to come down and stay whilst he's here. Eh?"

This promised to be something of a relief to Tom, who, now that he came to think of it, saw clearly enough that Baretti would hardly be comfortable if left to the sole society of Carroll senior. So the Fates arranged between them that Antonio Baretti should be proved. He had no excuse for declining, and his perturbation on being asked was taken to express no more than a little shyness. He was so afraid of the real cause of his unwillingness being guessed that he made next to no resistance, and before work was begun that morning the thing was settled. On the day before Tom's departure for London, Baretti was to take up his abode at Lording's house, and stay there until the portrait was finished. Then everybody was to go up together to witness Tom's triumph at the concert—for, of course, nobody thought success doubtful—and Baretti, after the concert, was to start for his native Naples.

Miss Lording had an easy time of it, and Baretti scarcely called upon her. He was not morose, as he had been on the previous day, but his manner was subdued and softened. Mary felt herself surrounded by a novel and pleasing atmosphere. The smell of Baretti's paints was an ingredient in it, but that was inevitable and easily endured, and it was surely nice to have awakened an artist's artistic enthusiasm as she knew she had awakened those of the Italian, and to have her affianced lover there to pet or tease as she would—by signs so slight as not to be detected by two of the quartet present. Lording was proud of his daughter and proud of Tom, and proud of Baretti, and

was generally in high feather. For Baretti this morning there was a sort of luxury in resignation. He had complete faith in his renunciation of the night before. There was no more need for resolution, and he had simply to be passive and to let time drift him along as rapidly as might be until he could go away and begin to forget.

There was a piano in the room, and Tom sat down to it now and again and played a snatch of music. Lording watched the work of painting with a child-like interest, and Mary moved about gayly in the long and frequent intervals of liberty the artist accorded her. Once or twice she came so near to Baretti in her innocent ignorance, and stood watching the work so close behind him, that although no portion of her dress so much as touched him, her nearness was like an embrace, under which every sense of his frame and every faculty of his mind seemed to swoon. When she posed for him, sometimes gravely and sometimes overbrimming with gayety, and he met the steadfast unconscious look of her lovely eyes, or saw the laughter of a young and innocent nature there, and the gladness of a beautiful harmless vanity, he felt as if he were sinking into some lovely perfumed dream to die. And all the while he went on working with a singular consciousness of power over his materials and his theme. Niagara was three weeks off, and the passage along the Rapids was endurable. The position was not a new one.

The most admirable and becoming arrangements are made by consent of society at large for the prevention of unaccompanied meetings between young men and young women, notwithstanding which, young men and young women continue to meet without the society of their elders, to plan marriages of which those elders would righteously disapprove, and generally to conduct themselves as their elders did before them, and would again, if they were young again. But since her mother's death none of those arrangements had been in force in the case of Mary Lording, and she had known and enjoyed a freedom to which most girls of her age and station are strangers. It followed in her case—though naturally enough it might not follow in all cases—that she looked on young men with a sort of sense of brotherhood and *camaraderie*, that she was not in the least afraid of them or abashed before them. It was true enough that they made love sometimes, and

that (except in one special case) had always been disagreeable. Now of course nobody would dare to make love to her, and freedom was made freer than ever by that reflection. She would have associated herself quite fearlessly with any nice young fellow of reasonable position and antecedents who happened to come to her knowledge by any of the recognized roads, and in Baretti's case she was prepossessed in half a dozen different ways. He was her lover's dearest friend—he was a young man (in Tom's belief, and therefore in hers also) of the most transcendent genius—he was handsome and charming, and a foreigner —and—he had given very signal proof of enthusiasm about her portrait. Now, if you and I believed that a great artist was enthusiastic in his desire to commemorate our charming faces and figures, we should naturally have a good opinion of that artist's discernment, and should feel friendly toward him.

A profound melancholy laid its hand upon the artist when he was not at work, and this helped to make him interesting. He took interest in nothing that did not concern his art, except by fits, when he broke into vivid momentary enthusiasm and flashed back again into a gloom from which nothing could rouse him. He avoided all society when he was able, and though he strove to do it naturally and as if it were always the result of accident, the girl saw that he specially avoided her. This piqued her, and set her, with a woman's love of conquest, to vanquish his shyness and his desire for loneliness. So there came to be added to the little man's torments a dreadful sweet fear which brought temptation in its train. He was not a vain man, over and above the common, but it came into his heart one day to ask if the girl were drifting toward him as he had drifted toward her. If that were so he felt himself doomed, and there was an awful throb of joy at the fear.

If his melancholy had been at all of the stagey sort, Mary would have been one of the first young women in the world to laugh at him. But it was so real, so obviously unaffected, and so little obtrusive, that it not only piqued her into a desire to overcome the shyness which sprung from it, but extorted some pity from her as well.

Had Tom Carroll guessed what he was leaving behind him he might have declined Herr Hoffmann's flattering

offer. To leave the only woman who had ever breathed a word of love to him (for they got so far by this time at odd moments) and the dearest friend in the world in her society could scarcely seem unsafe to so generous and candid a nature. And, indeed, it does sometimes happen that a man's best friends do not betray him, and that a sweetheart is true. He went off with a light heart, and nine tenths of his ambition seemed already realized in fancy. To live a mere country gentleman's life, with no interest outside that narrow sphere, had seemed ignoble to him from his boyhood, and this one chance seemed to open up to him the whole world of art ambition, and with a forerunning enthusiasm which belongs to ardent young men of talent he felt like a Gounod or a Verdi already.

The great Herr Hoffmann received him politely, for a wonder, and the rehearsals passed away without memorable accident. Cousin Mark called at Number Twenty, Montague Gardens, and made himself agreeable in his own way.

"I have found a new profession," said Mark. "It pays just as well as the old one. Nothing a year, and pay your own expenses."

"Profitable," said Tom lounging in his arm-chair at the fireside.

"Isn't it?" said Mark, with his own cheerful and amiable smile. "I am teaching the charming signora to talk English."

"What charming signora?" Tom demanded. The memory of Signor Malfi and his mate had long since left him. Mark recalled him to the circumstance of their encounter.

"I find it useful to know them," said Mark, with his customary candor. "A poor devil like me has to fish for profitable acquaintances. You were born with a golden spoon in your mouth, and I don't suppose you ever knew what it was to want a fiver in your life. By —! Tom, I believe that of all the hard-up men in London, I am king and captain."

"Well," said Tom, with a rather fatuous good-nature, "you know where to come to." Mark laughed.

"I sha'n't leave you till I've drained you dry," he said. "I shall never pay you even if I am able, for I am by nature an ungrateful dog, and gratitude has always seemed to

me, to tell you the honest truth, the most absurd and misguided of all human sentiments. But if you will oblige me with a tenner—"

Tom laughed responsive, and obliged him on the spot.

"If ever anybody asks you for a testimonial of character," said Tom, "don't offer it yourself. Send him to me."

"My dear fellow," returned Mark, still smiling, "that sort of thing pays. If you proclaim yourself virtuous nobody believes you. Everybody knows that all the men are liars, and nobody believes anybody. Now I tell the truth about myself, and nobody believes *me*."

"Now, you know, Mark;" said Tom, who was amused by all this, "that's not a pretty sentiment."

"Don't come to me for pretty sentiments," Mark answered. "I am the only man I ever knew who wasn't either a liar or a fool. Now, you don't like to own it, but you know that ninety-nine parts in a hundred of all the talk about virtue and honor and public spirit are pure and unadulterated humbug. When you want to hear the truth about a man, go to his enemies. They'll tell you how degraded his motives are. If you want the truth about Gladstone read the high Tory journals. If you want the truth about Disraeli read the low Radical papers."

"Somebody says," Tom responded, "that the only way to understand a man is to love him."

"What a rule for a British jury with a knotty case of murder! No, no. The true rule of life is to think every man guilty until he proves himself innocent. Then you can admire his skillfulness of fence and distrust him all the more."

At this Tom fairly broke into laughter, and Mark, with his hand stretched out toward his wine-glass and his cigar half-way from his lips, laughed back at him quite gayly.

"I've got what I want," said Mark, emptying his glass and rising, "and now I'll go. I have to give the charming signora her English lesson this afternoon. Do you feel inclined for a walk?"

"Yes," said Tom, and in a minute or two, well coated, the cousins were in the crisp, wintery open air.

Tom thought little enough of Mark's rhodomontade. It was Mark's habit to profess cynicism, and the easy-going youngster, his cousin, with his kindly thoughts about all

people, and his amiable heart, would have found it difficult to believe that any man really cared to regulate his life by such a creed. But such conscience as Mark had was soothed by the candor of his discourse, though he admitted that even whilst he spoke the truth he expected nobody to believe him.

It was not a very honest exposition of his own character after all, but if, with the plain truth staring them in the face, people refused to believe in it, was that Mark's fault?

"I don't know," said Mark, as they walked, "whether I am or not a particularly brilliant teacher, but if I am not I have an especially brilliant pupil. You remember when we met that woman? She didn't know a score of English words, upon my honor, and now she can understand a lot that's said to her, and she chatters away in a surprising manner. Come in with me and hear her. She's amusing."

"No, thank you," said Tom.

"You will, though," answered Mark, "and I'll tell you why. Malfi has got all the tenor music of Hoffmann's new opera. He's a slow poor sort of creature, and it takes him a month to learn a tune. The charming signora plays with one finger—for he doesn't know a note and she's not much better—and they hammer it out in that way between them. He has learned half a dozen of the airs now, and sings them decently. He'll be grateful if a swell pianist like yourself will give him a turn, and I'm sure you'll like the music."

"I'll go for that," said Tom, "though I wouldn't for the broken English."

"The charming signora," pursued Mark, "has learned English enough already under my tuition, to venture on taking English music pupils."

"And she plays with one finger?" said Tom.

"Oh, that's my playful way of putting it. She's a bad enough pianist, but not quite so bad as that. I wrote an advertisement for her a week ago, for pupils, and sent it to the 'Times.'"

When they reached the house in which Signor Malfi had apartments the piano was in full swing, and a powerful soprano voice was screaming a bravura. The powerful soprano left off in the middle, and the accompaniment reverting to the beginning, another voice took up the air.

"No, no, no, no, no," the signora's voice was heard crying. "Like zis," and the powerful voice began to scream again.

"Here's a pupil," said Mark, "the first fruits of the advertisement, no doubt." The pupil began to sing again, and Tom held up a finger to ask for silence. There was a look of perplexity on his face. "What's the matter?" asked his cousin.

"That's odd," said Tom. "I'll bet anything I know that voice." They were within the house, and waiting for the operatic tenor in the next room to that in which the lesson was being given. "I am sure of the voice," said Tom, "I can't be mistaken."

"Whose is it?" Mark demanded, but at that instant the signor entered.

"We are indebted to you, Signor Carroll," said he to Mark; "the advertisement has already secured a pupil, an English miss. It was a good thought, and it will occupy, Caterina in my absence. I have engagements in Paris and Vienna, but she has not, and will remain here. There is a voice!" The screaming soprano was turned on again. "For volume and compass it is unrivaled in Europe. Yet the managers will not engage her."

The singer was disposed to be voluble on this matter, and he talked until Tom (knowing nothing of the language in which the conversation was conducted) strolled to the window, and, staring out on the street, fell into a day-dream. He was startled from it by the sudden slamming of the street door, and a second later he saw a familiar figure—the figure of a girl whose skirts were blowing picturesquely in the wind, and who bore a roll of music in her hand.

"Look here, Mark," he cried. "Isn't that little Azubah Moore? You know! The little girl at the farm at home? We used to play with her when we were lads together."

"By Jove, it is!" cried Mark, as the girl turned for a moment to face the wind and rearrange her dress.

"That is Caterina's pupil," said the Italian, making an easy shot at the purport of their talk. "She will never sing. She has not the volume or the compass."

"What does he say?" asked Tom, and Mark translated. "That's a matter of opinion," said Tom, nodding his

head sagely, "and all the same, I'd sooner hear her than that railway whistle in the next room. What on earth made a singer marry a woman with a voice like that?"

"Marry?" cried Mark, smilingly. "He's no more married than I am. Buono giorno, Signora Malfi," said Mark, as the lady entered, and he advanced to meet her with outstretched hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE time of Baretti's stay was coming to an end, and the portrait was all but finished. Tom was back in the country and was over every day to look at the growing beauties of the picture, not being unmindful in the meantime of the charms of the picture's original. If there might have been found in all broad England a happy man, that man was Tom Carroll. As he rode or walked between his father's house and Lording's on those bright mornings and bracing nights, his heart welled over with joy, and he caroled in the lonely lanes like a throstle. A good heart, a good digestion, lots of money, ambitions opening, a sweetheart beautiful and kind, and the dearest friend man ever had in the world—what more might he desire?

And all the while love and friendship were fighting in Baretti's heart, and making wild work of it there. The little man was sensitive of honor, and all his intensest desires and the secret hopes he tried to ignore were dishonorable.

Mary knew of his approaching departure from England, and sometimes spoke of it, not knowing the pain she gave him. Baretti was at work on the last Monday morning of his stay, and he was touching and retouching the ripened beauties of his picture with a lingering hand and a heart disposed to linger. From the canvas, the work of his own hands smiled upon him with how perfect a beauty! What is old Fairfax's verse?

> "Her hand, her foot, her vesture's hem,
> Muse, touch not for polluting them.
> All that is hers is clear, pure, holy."

His brush kissed her shoe upon the canvas as his lips would have felt it too bold to do in fact. The best worship he

could offer her seemed to soil her, for not only his love but his friendship made her sacred. A double passion made her doubly inaccessible, even to his thoughts, and yet his thoughts were rebels to his will and would assail her. And she sat there the while, chatting and smiling, stooping to the friendliest intimacy, and holding him miles and miles away.

"Mr. Carroll tells me," she said, "that you have no friends left in Naples."

"None," he answered.

"And yet you suffer from homesickness? Do you love the place so much?" He shook his head and answered without looking at her.

"I have a double reason for going. But the reason I have given is light beside the reason I have not given." She did not answer to this enigma, but looked at him with inquiring interest. "A duty calls me there. I can say nothing of it, except that it is a duty and a hard one. But in this world one does not always what is pleasant. Fate brings you nasty mixtures and does not care for your wry faces."

"No," she said assentingly. His sadness and his resignation touched her, and her tone was caught from his.

"There is a friend of mine," he went on, mixing a delicate tint upon his palette, and keeping his glance resolutely fixed upon it, "who did me a great service. I made a promise to him in return. He does not know of it yet, but I know that it is a thing of life and death to him that I should keep my promise now. I lose nothing by it, but there are circumstances which make it hard to keep."

He had thought when he began that he could trust himself to say so much and no more, but a sudden terror fell upon him lest he should betray his secret. He stopped abruptly, and began to paint almost blindfold. There was a silence for a minute or two, and then he discovered that his work was going wrong, and he busied himself in restoring it.

"I must not pry into your secrets, Mr. Baretti," she said, after this pause, "but it is easy to see that you do not like the task you are taking upon yourself. Are you quite sure that duty calls you to it?"

"My way is plain," he answered. In an Englishman his manner might have looked a little overdramatic here,

but it was so evidently real in him that it passed for pure nature, as it was. "I am bound by every tie of honor and of friendship." He began to feel a glow of strength and hope even as he spoke: "And if I were what a man should be, I should not even feel a regret at doing it. When I am in my right mind I shall be glad that I have done it. It will be very disagreeable to do, and I am like a child who is offered medicine. That is all."

"Your friend does not know yet that he needs your services?" she asked. If Mary Lording had only known it, she herself was going on a dangerous road. Her accepted lover, whom she had known all her life, and for whom she had a most sincere and tender friendship, had never interested her as Baretti did. But she had no time just now to stop and analyze.

"He will not know," said the painter, turning his face upon her. She read a look of exaltation there which it was impossible for any man to have feigned. The flashing eyes and handsome face were transfigured by that emotion of friendship and the strength of soul by which he repelled temptation. "He would only know that he had needed me and that I had broken faith if I did not keep my word. And he is a friend so true, with a heart so honest and kind, that when I think that I have been afraid to be a little uncomfortable when I do my duty, I am ashamed—ashamed."

She had never seen him in any such mood before. Whatever the duty he had set himself might be, it was plain enough that it entailed more than a little discomfort, and his single-heartedness roused her to a momentary flush of enthusiasm.

"We shall all be sorry to lose you, Mr. Baretti," she said, "but not one of your friends will ask you to linger when you have such an errand." And she held out her hand like a queen. Baretti dropped his brush, accepted the proffered hand, and bowed above it. She shook hands frankly like a man, and returned to her seat. Baretti picked up the fallen brush, and went on working, but she saw suddenly that he was as pale as death, and somehow, whether by instinct or by chance, she read his fable through and through, not as if by a guess, but as if by the light of absolute certainty.

She was conscious enough of her beauty, and was little

to be blamed upon that score, for, apart from the innocent vanity which leads young people to think well of their own attractions, she had had hers so dinned into her ears by lovers who languished and lovers who stormed and lovers who wrote verses and needy fortune-hunters who wanted money and had no objection to taking a pretty wife with a fortune, that she had more than the ordinary excuses for a knowledge of her charms. But she was a girl with a healthy mind, and a heart that had room in it for much more than the joy of being admired. Her first conscious mental act was to repel the fancy, but the fancy proved, sudden as it was, a fixed belief, and would not be repelled. Then a pang of pity and sorrow touched her heart, and then—was she sorry? For whom? For Tom—for Baretti—for herself? For a moment she felt as a swimmer feels when he floats unsuspectingly into a sudden, powerful eddy, and finds himself rolled helplessly over and over.

She had never doubted her affection for Tom Carroll, the steady growth of years of intimacy and pleasant intercourse. It was not the love she had read of in plays and books, and she had set down plays and books, in her own mind, as exaggerative if not false. That she could love a man whom she had not known for more than two months was palpably preposterous and unnatural. That she could be false to her dear old friend and newly affianced lover even in a thought was a thing too absurd to need to be refuted. Each of these mental postulates stood unshakable, and yet—she sat in sudden terror of herself. If the man loved her—? She dared not face the result of that inquiry.

Baretti, with only self-possession enough left to know that he must still disguise himself, turned away from the picture, and began to scrape the color from his palette. Mary arose, and trying to speak naturally, asked—

"You can do without me for the present, Mr. Baretti?" Her voice sounded strangely unsympathetic and cold, alike on her own ears and on his.

"Thank you—yes," he answered hoarsely; and not daring to commit herself to more words she withdrew. "I have betrayed myself," said Baretti, miserably. And then such a new foolish battle began within him as you may picture to yourself by the aid either of imagination or experience. First he rejoiced to think that at least she knew

he worshiped her, and then he was ashamed of his rejoicing. Then, at least, his sufferings were known, and then new shame rushed at him for that base hope. But at last, and after no very prolonged spell at this old and unprofitable exercise, he resolved, "I will finish the picture and go, and in the meantime I will keep out of her way." So he hardened his heart, and, in spite of his pitiable state, he set to work again. Storms of noble shame and ignoble joy swept through him, and there were moments when he could neither think of his work nor see it, but he held on resolutely in the main. There was so little to do that but for his love for the theme and his loyalty to his friend he could well have borne to leave it undone, and two or three hours of resolute labor saw him to the close. The luncheon-bell rang, and he disregarded it. Lording came up in person to look after him.

"Too busy to come down-stairs, Baretti?"

"I shall have finished in half an hour," he answered; "I can not leave it now." Lording, who had quite a superstitious reverence for his guest's genius and its various urgencies, went out on tiptoe, and excused Baretti to his guests. He had to excuse his daughter also, for she sent word that she was troubled by a headache, and kept her room till dinner-time, though Tom came over in the afternoon with only an hour to spare, and rode away disappointed. He drove over again in the evening, and found her languid and unlike herself, but he was better pleased that evening in spite of the lover-like fears that assailed him than he had ever been before in her society; for she seemed to cling to him, and was so sweet and kind, and withal seemed for once so dependent on him, that he went home in a state of blissful worship and security. It was natural, but more than a little pitiful. The poor girl wanted to make up to him for a second's infidelity, not daring to guess that the whole course of her life had changed, and the poor lad went away flattered and enraptured until he scarce felt mortal, and had no faintest notion that he had seen the last flicker of love's little flame. In two hearts friendship and honor struggled against a passion that has vanquished both a million times. But though love had conquered one, the other had not yet capitulated, and even in Baretti's case honor and friendship were pilot and steersman, though passion commanded the craft.

And between them they played their captain false right stanchly, and the little man went his way sore but resolute.

Baretti's unfortunate parable had been set forth on a Monday; the concert at which Tom's work was to be played was one of a Wednesday's series; and on Tuesday from the two houses of Carroll and Lording there was an exodus. Thomas Carroll the elder, much as he objected to Tom's appearance, was not insensible to the flattering notice taken of the event by the local county people, and notably by my Lord Bonnamy, who was an enthusiastic musical amateur, and he had consented to go up to London and listen to the performance. Lording and Mary were also going, though the girl now began to feel exceedingly guilty and unhappy.

"My dear," said the old fellow, addressing his daughter an hour or two before the time fixed for departure, "I want you to do me a favor."

She asked him somewhat uninterestedly what it might be, and he, with a face of mystery, drew from his waistcoat pocket a tiny morocco case no bigger than a pill-box. This being opened revealed a ring with a splendid diamond set in it.

"This is for Signor Baretti," said Lording, with a sly laugh. "He painted that picture for Tom, you know, and of course we can't let a thing like that go unrecognized. Heaven only knows what it's worth! I'm sure I don't. A thousand pounds perhaps. Now, I want you to give him this ring from me and to ask him to wear it as a memento of his visit and his kindness."

"Papa," said the girl, with a look of wounded indignation, "how can you ask me to do such a thing? No, dear; no."

"Bless my soul!" cried the old gentleman, "where's the impropriety? Never mind. There, there. Never mind. I'll give it him myself. Will you come with me?"

She assented lingeringly, and Lording, too dull of perception to notice her manner, led the way to the room Baretti had used as a studio. The artist was putting up his brushes, and after the manner of lovers, was making inward protestations above the senseless things that had been associated with his passion. He would keep them till he died, and they should never touch canvas any more, having once been glorified by such a theme. But, indeed,

as some of us remember well enough, the slightest things grow sacred to a lover.

"Signor Baretti," said Lording in his bluff, hearty way, "I've something here which I want you to be good enough to accept as a little memorial of your visit here. I hope you'll wear this for my sake, and that you'll think of us sometimes when you look at it. It's not much of a gift compared with the beautiful work you're leaving behind you, but it's just a little souvenir of my daughter and myself, and we shall both be very pleased if you'll accept it."

The painter looked and felt embarrassed. Compared with his host he was a very poor man indeed, and the gift looked like a payment.

"Pray, take it, Mr. Baretti," said Mary.

"I am very sensible of your kindness," said Baretti. "I will never part with it." He was so obviously affected, though Lording had no guess as to the real reason for his discomposure, that the old gentleman himself found it necessary to blow his nose, being, as he was, exceedingly susceptible to all sorts of friendly emotion.

"Nice-hearted little fellow he is, to be sure," he said to his daughter a minute or two later. "Takes to people like a dog, doesn't he?"

It was scarcely the commendation Mary would have chosen had she been in a mood to commend him, but she said nothing, and went away to superintend her maid's preparations for the journey.

When the journey came it was a dull one. Mr. Carroll had a pompous disapproval of its object, and smiled superior above the age which permitted a gentleman to play such tricks with his position. Baretti and Mary were silent, and Tom was crushed by his father. The talk devolving chiefly on Lording, that excellent old fellow kept things going for a while and at last went to sleep over his "Times." The painter left them at the London terminus, and went to his chambers taking his belongings with him, hoping to breathe freely once again and knowing his hope futile. The quartet went to an hotel, and awaited the event which had brought them all to town.

In spite of the energetic applause of Lording and Baretti the "Dream of Venice" achieved but a qualified success, and fell a little flat upon the audience. On the morning after the performance Mr. Carroll scanned the critiques in

the daily papers, and was confirmed in his opinion that the pursuit of artistic honors was unworthy of a gentleman. Nobody had ever dared to make quite so free with the name of Carroll as these anonymous and irresponsible reviewers. None of them were warm and some were frigid. "If this young composer," said the Censor, "desires to prosper in his profession, and to secure the public ear, he must," etc., etc.

"Thomas," said Mr. Carroll, with a pitying smile, "read this, and tell me if a pursuit in which your position is so liable to be misunderstood is a pursuit to be adopted by my son?"

Now Tom, although he was as good-natured a young fellow and as submissive to the paternal authority as need be, was a little sore that morning about several things. To begin with, faint applause is as bad as downright damnation to an ardent seeker of the arts, and Tom had seen himself in fancy on the way to Fame's pinnacle when the great Hoffmann condescended to produce his work. The disappointment was hard to bear. He had tasted the last of his sweetheart's sweetness, for the girl was beginning to be sore distraught in her own mind, and seemed almost apathetic about the whole matter, deeply as it concerned him. Baretti had his own troubles to think about, and sincere as his friendship was, and genuine his belief in Tom's genius, his praise had sounded forced and unreal. And so in his soreness Tom answered his father disrespectfully for the first time in this history or out of it.

"Position!" cried Tom. "Good heavens, sir, what is *my* position?" Mr. Carroll sighed and smiled, with pitying eyebrows raised again.

"It has been the object of my life," said Mr. Carroll, neither in sorrow nor in anger, but with a resigned allowance for his son's aberrations, "it has been the object of my life to instill into you a proper understanding of that position. The age is tending downward, Tom, and I am not so wanting in perspicacity that I can not see it, or that I can not allow for the effect it has upon your conduct. But I am not eager to see my son foremost in the race for degradation."

"Degradation" cried Tom, hotly.

"Degradation was the word I used," said Mr. Carroll, with unusual severity of manner. "I will thank you not

to echo my observations in a tone which I can only characterize as dishonoring to yourself and me."

"Will you kindly tell me what I have done, sir?" asked Tom. There was a little of the old man's obstinacy and vanity in him, though his better qualities obscured them.

"My dear Tom," said his father, waving his large white hands expressively. "My dear Tom." He went with great deliberation through his usual snuff-box pantomime, and even got so far as to raise the lid. He closed it with a snap and restored it to his waistcoat-pocket. "Think the thing over, Tom," he said, with the nod of a man who is prepared to give another a chance. "I am not without faith in your natural good sense, and it is possible that last night's fiasco may have taught you something."

"Fiasco!" said Tom.

"I repeat the word," said his father. "When a gentleman stoops to such a proceeding as yours of yesterday nothing can atone for it but the outstripping of all competitors."

"Forgive me, sir," returned Tom, "if I close a discussion conducted in such terms." He left the room in a great heat, and that was the beginning of a quarrel between father and son which lasted a long time, and left a certain estrangement, even when the outer breach was healed.

The youngster was flinging out of the hotel when he met Baretti.

"I have come to say good-bye to your father and to Mr. Lording," said the artist. Tom turned back with him and led the way to Lording's private sitting-room. Mary was sitting with her father, and bade Baretti a collected good-bye, which, remembering how close they had been together for the last month and more, was more cool than courteous. The ordeal was a severe one for Baretti, but he had schooled himself to go through with it, and he gave no sign which anybody but the girl could read. Mr. Carroll that evening returned to Trench House, and Lording and Mary also left London. Nobody felt in very high spirits, and even Lording was dashed by Tom's *succès d'estime*.

It was evening when the disappointed musician returned to his own chambers in Montague Gardens. He sat moodily by the fire for an hour and heard Baretti packing overhead. By and by, remembering how sad and woe-

begone the little man seemed at leaving England, in spite of his homesickness, Tom's good heart began to warm again. He would go and cheer his friend a little. His slippered feet made no noise upon the stair, and Baretti's door was ajar. He pushed it wide, and entering, stood amazed and solicitous. The painter, in his velvet sack and his gay slippers, was kneeling at a great arm-chair with his head buried in the cushion, and his whole frame was shaking with sobs, though he gave scarcely a sound. Tom backed out, gently drew the door to its old position, and went silently down-stairs.

"He has some trouble of which I know nothing," said Tom to himself. And as the thought crossed him, the painter rose from his knees in the room above. He had been kneeling over Mary Lording's picture, the first sketch for the portrait, and the beautiful face glimmered uncertainly through the tears which had fallen from his eyes upon it. There are more ways of being strong than one, and Baretti's was the weak way. The poor, weak, unwise, little fellow kissed the picture and locked it away in one of his portmanteaus. He was never cut out for a hero, and it was hard to run away from the delight of her presence. But if he were not true to Tom Carroll, friendship was a farce, and there was no such thing as honor in the world.

CHAPTER IX.

"Tom," said Mark, comfortably lolling in Tom's most comfortable arm-chair, and smoking one of Tom's cigars, "why don't you learn Italian? It has always been a wonder to me that you never went in for it."

"I ought to know it," said Tom. "Everybody who goes for music ought to know Italian."

"Then why not learn it?" asked Mark.

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom, with a disgusted look. "Such a lot of trouble."

"Nonsense," said Mark, "a mere distraction. I'll tell you how to do it pleasantly. Come and sit at the signora's lessons. You'll help her English and she your Italian."

"Well, I don't altogether care," Tom answered, after a little pause. "I don't altogether care about mixing with

people of that sort. Unmarried ladies who reside with gentlemen twice divorced are not much in my line."

"Pooh!" said Mark. "My dear Tom, the maxims you cherish would have served admirably for your grandmother to work on samplers. There never were any wicked ages and there never were any moral ages, in spite of all the lies historians tell. There have been ages when what is called Vice—which would do very well for Virtue if it changed its name—has been hidden; ages in which it has been published, and ages in which it has been condoned. This is an age in which it is condoned. Pardon me, my dear Tom," continued Mark, with his own characteristic smile, "if I seem to assume a clerical tone with you. You are very young for your years, Tom. Your heart is fresh and ingenuous, and your memory is faithful to the traditions of the past. You remember your copy-book morals. And what the deuce, my dear fellow," cried Mark, rising to his feet, and taking his cousin by the shoulders, "what the deuce have we to play at age for? Crabbed age and youth can not live together. Shake off dull care and come with me. A young eye beneath a gray eyebrow is a prettier thing than a gray head on young shoulders. And, all nonsense apart, old fellow, you'll do me a good turn. I am the sort of man who, all nonsense apart, generally wants somebody to do him a good turn."

"How?" said Tom. You had only to put it to this foolish young fellow that you needed a good turn and he was at your service instanter.

"Well," returned Mark, "I'm not vainer than my neighbors. It's no tribute to good looks, for ugly men have as good fortune as handsome men, and sometimes better; it's no tribute to my wit, for the dear creatures absolutely prefer to fall in love with fools—it says nothing for my moral character. I'm not proud about it. It's a confounded nuisance in point of fact, and I'm simply unable to help it. The signora, Tom, has taken it into her Italian head to fall in love with her English master, and I'm a little bit afraid of her. I thought you might like to learn Italian, and I thought that while you did so I might secure a little immunity from danger. You see, I can't give up the lessons very well, until I have fulfilled my promise. It doesn't matter. If I get an Italian dagger between my ribs, you'll see me decently buried, won't you?"

"I don't mind coming," said Tom, "though the idea of having *you* to chaperon is a little droll, isn't it? When are you going next?"

"This afternoon," returned Mark, "if you can come. But not otherwise, for a thousand pounds. She has wonderful eyes, Tom, and when she plants her elbow on the table and drops her chin into the palm of her hand and languishes at me for half a minute at a time in the middle of the verb 'To Love' it's a little dangerous. Confess it?"

"I don't know," said Tom. The signora's bold black eyes had no charm for Tom. There was only one woman in the world for him.

"You would know," said Mark, laughing, "if you tried it."

"I'm not so sure of that, either," Tom responded. "I don't think I'm very susceptible to that sort of thing."

"I am," said Mark, laughing again. "But you'll come, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll come," said Tom. "But where's the signor all this time? Why doesn't he look after the lady?"

"Well, he's a curious fellow," answered Mark. "He's not jealous on the surface. He goes about and takes his own liberty a good deal and leaves her to take hers. But if he had a thought that things were going wrong, he's the sort of man to be on the spot with bowl and dagger in a minute. I'm glad you've promised to come, though there are only ten lessons more on the programme. By that time you'll have warmed to the work, and I'll go on with you at any time you like to mention until you've finished. It's a pretty tongue.

"'I like the language—that soft bastard Latin,
That melts like kisses from a female mouth.'"

And Mark began to spout Italian verses. Tom listened, tranquilly amused.

"You pretend to be a cynic, Mark," he said; "and yet you're crammed with innocent enthusiasms."

"Am I not?" cried Mark, with his own smile. "What a complex creature the human animal is, isn't he, Tom? Come, we'll lunch somewhere together and then drop down stream to the signora's."

Tom was not altogether at his ease, but after all, the

thing was a trifle, and Mark was very right in the main. Nobody seemed to think so much of one's associates now as they had used to do. The idea of having Mark to take care of tickled him a good deal, and he was pretty sure that some companionship seemed necessary, or Mark would not have asked for it.

"If I were a humbug," said Mark, after luncheon, "I should draw out my purse and make a lingering pretense of paying the bill. I should then discover that I had left my last five-pound note at home. Not being a humbug I confess my poverty. How devilish nice it must be to have money always! Were you ever in want of a sovereign, Tom?"

"Many a time when I was at school," said Tom; "but not since."

"Lucky dog!" cried Mark. "Pay up, old man, and we'll make a start. I won't smoke restaurant cigars whilst you have one of those Principales in your case. Thanks."

The two cousins strolled calmly in the bright winter afternoon to the residence of Signor Malfi, and there went through the Italian-English lesson. The whole affair was severely business-like until the end, and the signora made no eyes at Mark. But when they were preparing to go the lady suddenly addressed Mark in her own tongue.

"Your companion," she said suavely, "will not understand one word of what I am saying?"

"Not a word," responded Mark. "You may be quite sure of that if you speak quickly."

"Then why did you bring him here?" she demanded. "The poor, slow, stupid innocent!"

"Will you allow me to explain another time?" asked Mark. "I have very good reasons."

"You will be here to-night?" said the signora.

"Without fail," Mark answered. "You have been angry all the afternoon without cause. But I like you best when you are angry. Anger becomes you. There is nothing that does not become you, and you make darkness fair."

"You are a mocker," cried the lady, gayly. "Go now, but do not bring the stupid innocent any more. Good-bye." She turned to Tom and addressed him in her liquid,

pretty, broken-English. "It is pleasure to see you here, sir. I hope you will come often with Mistare Carroll."

Tom shook hands and protested he was very happy, with little more sincerity than the signora herself displayed.

"What had she to say to you in Italian?" he asked, when they were clear of the house.

"Well, to tell the truth," said Mark, turning a smiling face upon him, "she asked me not to bring you again, presumably because you interfered with her love-making. But you won't desert an old chum on that account, will you?"

"Oh," said Tom, disgustedly, "cut the lessons altogether. Bother the woman, with her painted eyes and her painted eyebrows and her confounded patchouli!"

"My dear Tom," returned Mark, taking his cousin's arm and speaking in a serious tone, "you know me well. You know that I make no pretense to be a moral fellow, and that I'm not given to atone for sins I am inclined to by damning those I have no mind to. Very well. I have made a faithful promise here, and in return for that promise—which was made before I saw any danger in it—have received certain favors. Small things, all of them—boxes at the theaters and that sort of thing—but something to a poor man like me. I have accepted these and I have made a promise. Now, I'm not a particular fellow, but I *must* keep a promise. Leave me a rag of virtue, Tom!"

"You are welcome to all you have," Tom answered, lightly; "but get the thing over as soon as you can and then drop it. I wish you'd find some other victim than myself."

"See me through it, Tom," said Mark, almost appealingly; "your virtue in this instance is its own reward. She is really a very cultivated woman, though I can not guess how she and Malfi came together, and she has a beautiful accent. And it's thoroughly worth your while to learn."

Tom assented, much against his will. His objections to the charming signora were unforced and genuine. The lad was in love, and Love taught him to nurse a lofty ideal of all feminine worth. He thought of Mary Lording's innocent though imperious beauty, and he unconsciously set beside her this flaring painted, Southern woman—an over-

blown hollyhock beside a tea-rose. And Tom was one of those young men—rarer nowadays than they should be—who find in purity a woman's crowning charm, and see in Virtue a something so sweet and majestic that it brings them almost to their knees.

With him, to think of Mary was pretty generally to think of his own unworthiness of so much grace and goodness, and now that his failure had humbled him without overmuch dispiriting him, to think of his unworthiness was immediately to resolve on being worthy. There seemed at such times only one way of deserving her. She sat side by side with his art, and if he could but once climb so high as to clasp the knees of his Goddess of Music he were high enough to touch the hem of his sweetheart's vestal garment also. In such a mood he went home and locked himself in for study. Midnight found him slaving away at a chorus of revelers for the opening of the second act of his opera, and he was on fire with his theme, and could hear the voices pealing, and the trumpets snarling, and fiddle and flute and hautboy and the rest all dashing onward in one sparkling cataract of sound.

Cousin Mark that evening grilled a chop in his own chambers, opened a small bottle of claret, and took his frugal dinner alone. Then he made a cup of coffee, lighted a cigar, and surrendered himself awhile to pleasant meditation. The cigar being finished, he cleared away, placing the soiled table utensils in readiness for the morning laundress, and having banked up the fire, assumed his hat and coat. He was standing in the hall with his finger on the key of the gaslight there, when a faint tap sounded at the outer door. He stepped forward on tiptoe and made a reconnaisance through an almost imperceptible slit cunningly cut through the door at the deepest sinking of the panel. There were duns in the world, as Mark (being not merely a poor man, but averse to parting with money when he had it) knew to the cost of comfort. This was a late hour for a common business dun, but there were plenty of people whom he would rather avoid meeting than meet.

The stairs and the landing were but dimly lighted, and he could not make out much of his visitor until, after tapping a second time, the figure retired a little to look up at the gaslit fanlight above his door. Then he knew it, and opening the door, stood hat in hand before the signora.

"Caterina!" he said, raising his eyebrows with a singular smile. "This is indiscreet, is it not?"

"It matters little," she answered, "whether I am discreet or not. Let me in, Marco."

"Certainly," he said, "if you wish it. But remember I have never asked this of you."

"I know it," she answered, as she passed him. "I am cold. You have a fire, have you not?"

"There is a fire in the sitting-room," he said, closing the outer door and waving her along the hall. She entered the room and he followed.

"Marco," she said reproachfully, "I had expected a little warmer welcome."

"My love," he answered, "I am so surprised to see you here! What shall I do to show how glad I am to see you? Pray sit down whilst I stir the fire. We shall have a fine blaze presently. Now, let me take off your cloak."

"No," she said, coldly, "I can help myself." She escaped from his too solicitous attentions, and removing her hat, stood to arrange her hair before the mantel-piece mirror. Then with a single motion she slipped from her cloak and threw it over a chair.

There are more ideals than one in the world, and in spite of Tom Carroll's cordial distaste for her, the signora was undoubtedly a fine woman in her way. A subdued light was favorable to her, and the gaslight was low. The fire began to flicker a little, and to light up her cheek, and her ripe lips and bright eyes, and to lay sudden flashes of gold color on the lights of the coal black-hair. Mark was something of a connoisseur in female charms, as has been said already, and he thought the signora had never looked to so much advantage since he had known her. He was too much of an artist in his own way to desire to spoil the coloring of the picture.

"Do you find this half light pleasant?" he asked. "Pray sit down. I think nothing more charming than firelight."

"Yes," she answered, "I have heard of that as one of your English tastes. But, Marco, do not let us talk of trivialities. I am in need of sympathy. I am unhappy, Marco, unhappy, most unhappy."

"Tell me your sorrows," said Mark, in his softest voice. He really spoke Italian amazingly well for an Englishman,

and his voice was round and musical. She was still unseated, and he approached her.

"Can I trust you?" she asked. "Say nothing. I have had experience enough of vows, and I know what they mean. Let me look at you. Let me see your face whilst I speak to you."

She moved suddenly, and turned the gas to its full height.

"A moment, my dearest," said Mark, turning the lights down a little. "I am a poor man, and can not afford to crack even a gas-globe wantonly. Now I am ready for inspection. Do you think I look honest?"

His voice had something of reproach in it, and his face was serious, though he bubbled with mirth beneath his mask of earnestness. "If you knew how much better you look in a more subdued light, my dear," he said to himself, "you might spare your face an ordeal. You don't need to rouge, but Tom was right, and the eyes and eyebrows *are* a little assisted by art." He wore a tender and appealing look whilst he thought thus, and stood with his hands reaching a little forward, as if to say, "Look your fill. There is nothing but honesty here."

"Marco," she said, "you look honest; and you have sworn over and over again that you love me."

"Love you!" he answered, "I worship the ground you tread upon!"

"Odd," said the real Mark Carroll, laughing under this mask. "They don't believe it, and yet they like to be told so. Human nature loves to be humbugged."

"I think," she said, "I *think* I can believe you."

"Believe me!" cried Mark, "I am simple honesty itself."

"An Israelite indeed," added the inward Mark, "in whom there is no guile."

"Tito's jealousy and harshness grow beyond control and beyond endurance. But I have no friends and no money, and I am in a foreign land, and you know what lies before me if I leave him. Can I trust you to be kind and good to me always? No, Marco, no! I shall be plain and middle-aged very soon, and then I shall have no charm for you."

Mark turned abruptly to hide the smile which would crease his lips and sparkle in his eyes in spite of all his efforts. He carried off the effect of that abrupt avoidance

of her glance by pacing with an angry-looking jerk in his step once up and down the room.

"There is no faith in a woman's heart," he said, when again he stood before her. "None."

"Marco," said the signora, plaintively, "I would willingly have faith in something. I would willingly believe that love is not altogether a vision, a dream, a mockery."

Now the annoying part of the business was that this Italian young person (who had seen a good deal of the very worst side of the world, and had learned to be wise, and had been taught over and over again the folly of staking gold against counters) was absolutely in earnest. It was all good fun to Mark, of course. If a pretty woman chose to throw herself at Mark's head he was not the man to say her nay. The dear creatures had strange ways, and above all things in the world they loved to be humbugged. Well. He had no objection to giving them their own way so long as it cost nothing but a little play-acting.

"Caterina," he said, "if I were a wealthy man—if I could offer you a home befitting your own divine charms—would you scrutinize my motives in this way? But because I am poor you doubt me."

"Will you let me share your poverty, Marco?" she asked, passionately. "I could be good with you. I could be at peace again. I would be true to you. I would work for you. I do not want fine clothes. I do not want fine rooms. I can do without all those things. I only want a little love, Marco, a little kindness, a little peace. And since I have known what love is, Tito is hateful to me."

She swept her gloved hand across her eyes, and Mark stole an arm about her waist. Up to now the signora had furnished very good sport to Mark, but here the game had turned to bay, and he himself seemed likely to be hunted.

"*Mia carissima,*" said Mark, tenderly, "you know I love you. A passion like mine is not to be doubted. No woman ever lived who would not recognize a tenderness so devoted. You know it. Your own heart tells you that I love you. But you propose a thing impossible—at least for the present. Let us meet when we may. Let us extract what moments of sweetness from the bitter hours we can."

"You love me," she cried, "and yet you bid me go back to Tito! No, no, Marco. That is not the love I

want. I want peace, Marco—peace and rest—the peace and rest you promised me. Not that."

"We must wait for that," said Mark, soothingly. "I am so poor, Caterina, that I can scarcely provide for myself, and if I accepted the generous offer of your foolish heart we should both starve together."

"If I go back to Tito," she flashed at him, suddenly, "I stay with him forever. I hate him, and my life is all a lie with him, but I will not live a double lie. Oh, I hate all the world—myself—and you, because I love you so."

"Let her have her head," said Mark, with inward quiet, though he feigned to be perturbed and pretended to soothe her. "She'll race herself out of breath in a little while. We've had thunder and lightning enough," he went on, with a change of simile, "here comes the rain. In half an hour we shall have clear skies again."

If it had been possible to sit down in shelter and smoke whilst the tempest raged, Mark felt that the situation would have been passable. But it was a decided nuisance to have to make love to a crying woman whose eyes were actually growing smeary while she wept.

"She doesn't guess what a face she's making," said Mark. "But I shall at least have the advantage of seeing her *au naturel* when the paint is all gone. It can't last long at this rate." And all the while he was soothing her and patting her hand, and making the most chivalrous love in the world.

"No, Marco," she said at length, "you do not love me. You do not care to be alone with me."

"Caterina!" said Mark, upbraidingly.

"No," she said, "you do not, or why should you have brought that stupid innocent this afternoon? If it had not been for him I should not have been angry, and then I should not have quarreled with Tito, and then I should not have come here to scold and cry. Why did you bring him?"

"Caterina," said Mark, "listen to me and be reasonable. Tito is growing jealous, and I brought my cousin as a blind. I am not very much of a coward, but if Signor Malfi is to be hanged at all I prefer that he should be hanged for killing somebody else."

"Do you think Tito guesses that you love me?" she asked.

"I know it," he answered, scarcely able to suppress a smile. The swarthy signor's jealousy was a little more urgent than Mark's affection. Mark knew that, and he had a keen sense of humor.

"Marco," cried the signora, "he is dangerous."

As the words left her lips there came a loud knocking at the door, and she sprung to her feet with a suppressed scream.

"Be quiet," said Mark, calmly. He kicked off his shoes and crept out to reconnoiter, and when he came back he was a trifle pale. "Tito," he said in a whisper, and the signora looked about her like one in deadly terror. "You are safe enough," said Mark, seizing her by the shoulders and shaking her pretty sharply to bring her to herself. "Come this way. Step lightly. Take off your shoes. Now take them in your hand. This way." He himself seized her hat and cloak, and stepping like a ghost, led the way into the hall. The main door opened upon a double set of chambers, one of which was empty and unlet. Mark, who liked to know things, had found that one of his keys fitted the lock, and being as cool as a cucumber in this somewhat awkward strait (directly the first shock was over), he called this fact to mind and utilized it. There was another loud knocking at the outer door as Mark stooped to apply his key. He took advantage of the noise to move quickly, and thrusting the signora into the cold darkness of the next hall, he closed the door, whipped back to his own room on tiptoe, pulled on his slippers, hastily disordered his hair before the mirror, and walked out to meet his visitor.

He threw open the door, and casting both arms in the air, yawned portentously.

"Is that you, Malfi?" he asked in a sleepy voice. "Ugh! How cold it is. Come in. I am glad to see you. One gets diabolically dull of an evening sitting all alone, and I must have fallen asleep. I heard a knocking, and dreamed that I was at the siege of Sevastopol."

CHAPTER X.

THE swarthy fat man looked hard at Mark and listened to his speech without reply. His breathing was thick and heavy, though Mark had given him ample time to recover from any bodily distress the mounting of the stairs may have caused him. The barrister cast his arms abroad afresh and yawned as if he would fall in pieces, and the singer still stared hard at him without a word.

"Come in," said Mark, with admirable calmness. "Don't stand there in the cold."

Signor Malfi without a word walked in and Mark closed the door behind him.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Mark, appearing suddenly to notice the singular pallor which lay on the singer's dark skin, and the remarkable expression of his eyes. Malfi looked round the room deliberately, and his stertorous breathing sounded noisily distinct in the silence of the place. "Why, man," cried Mark, "you look as if you had seen a ghost."

Signor Malfi surveyed him darkly for a moment, and still without a word took up a candlestick which stood upon the mantel-shelf, and set it upon the table. Mark saw that his hand shook slightly as he drew a case of vestas from his pocket, and striking one of the matches, held its flame to the wick of the candle. As a matter of course Mark knew what was going to happen, but he was not such a fool as not to be downright amazed by the Italian's proceedings.

"My dear Malfi," said Mark, in well-acted wonder and commiseration, "what is the matter? What can I do for you?"

Signor Malfi threw the vesta into the fire, took up the candlestick, and walked into the hall, Mark following. The singer having examined the fastenings of the door, shot the two bolts, which had almost rusted into their sockets with long disuse.

"Are you mad?" said Mark, seizing him by the shoulder. "Speak. Tell me what is the matter, and what you want."

"I shall find what I want," said Signor Malfi, opening his lips for the first time, and nodding at the barrister with a wicked look.

The signora heard the shriek of the rusty bolts, heard Mark's questions and Malfi's answer, and scarcely dared to breathe as she listened, crouching behind the door.

"Come, now," said Mark, with the air of a man who is beginning to find it hard to keep his temper. "*What* do you want? If my opinion is worth anything you want a strait-waistcoat."

"Come with me," said Malfi, looking at him with half-closed eyes. "I will show you what I want."

He walked back along the hall, and stooping at the sitting-room door found a key in the lock. He closed the door and turned the key, and then, light in hand, made for the little kitchen where the laundress left her work undone as a matter of daily routine.

"You madman!" cried Mark. "Stand still." He swung the Italian round and looked at him with searching inquiry. "Tell me what you want," he said, slowly and deliberately, as if to carry understanding to a mind not easily apprehensive of ideas. "Tell me what you want, or I shall have to call for the police and see you taken care of. You must know that you are not acting like a man who is in possession of his faculties. Now," gently and coaxingly, "what do you want?"

"Bah!" said Malfi, with a sudden flash of light in his sickly, half-closed eyes. "Do not play with me. Let me go. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Your eyes are made to look honest enough, but I can see the lie behind them. Let me go."

"What do you want?" asked Mark. "What do you mean by walking into my apartments in this way? Tell me. I will endure no more of this folly."

"My good friend," returned Signor Malfi, with a very singular smile, "you will endure me until I have made my search and have found what I want. When that is done I will go, but not before."

Mark cast his hands abroad in a sort of resigned desperation.

"Very well," he said. "You must have your way, I suppose. What do you want to look for? Where do you expect to find it? Go on and have done with it. Mad!"

said Mark in an inward-sounding voice. "Mad! quite mad!"

"You are a very good actor," said Signor Malfi, nodding at him. Something of the look of certainty the Italian's face had hitherto worn faded from it as Mark returned his gaze. With nearly all men an assumption of a facial expression begets an answering inward emotion. The genuine pretender is more easily affected in his way than another, and Mark had now so long been looking amazement at his visitor that he almost began to feel it. He only waved his hands in answer as if to say that this obvious madman must be borne with and humored for a moment.

Malfi pushed by him with a look of renewed decision, and Mark followed, interrupting him no more, but standing resignedly by. The Italian's search was complete enough, but it led to nothing. He prowled over the whole place, candlestick in hand, and the owner of the chambers having lit a cigarette by this time followed him with an aspect of resigned boredom as of one who had given up wonder.

"Now, will you tell me what you wanted?" he asked.

"Where have you hidden her?" demanded Malfi, with an ugly coolness.

"Oh," said Mark, "there is a lady in the case! My good sir, I am not so honored or so blessed as to have a lady in these poor rooms of mine just now. Pray complete your search if you are still unconvinced. Take your time, and do not allow me to stand at all in your way."

So saying he sat down in the arm-chair, threw himself comfortably back into it and crossed his legs.

"Where have you hidden her?" asked Malfi again with the same threatening quietude of manner.

"My good friend," said Mark, "my rooms are perfectly open to you, and you may look through them until you are satisfied. As a mere affair of detail, I should like to know of whom you are in search. Do I know the lady?"

"This once," said Malfi, "you have baffled me. But you have not changed my mind, and what I knew before I came here I know still. I shall go now—"

"Thank you, sir," said Mark sweetly.

"But before I go I will tell you that I am not a man to be played with. If I killed you here in England they

would hang me, and I do not want to be hanged. You will do me a favor, therefore, if you will keep out of my way."

"You do yourself less than justice," answered Mark, with his sinister smile. Easily as he seemed to take it all, he watched the Italian as a cat a mouse, and stretching out a lazy hand to a little drawer in his writing-desk, he drew out a toy revolver. "Signor Malfi," he said, playing with the pistol as he spoke, "I should be a fool if I pretended not to understand you clearly. I should not be a man of honor if I treated you simply with the contempt your conduct deserves, and left you to the misery of your own mad fancies. It is likely enough that you will not believe me, but I declare—not for your sake, but for hers—that I am innocent of any design against your domestic peace—that I esteem your wife too highly to approach her with any other sentiments than those of respect and friendship."

"Yes," said Malfi. "It is not difficult to lie." He moved toward the door, speaking loudly. "And if she is within reach of my voice, as I believe she is, she will know, as you know, that I am a dangerous man to cross."

"You are an amusing vagabond," said Mark lightly, as he rose to follow him. "Good-night. If I am troubled by you in future I shall apply to the police—not for protection—but for delivery from a nuisance. On the other hand, signor, you may rely upon me to trouble your domestic bliss no further. May I trouble you to draw back the bolts? Thank you. Good-night. Allow me to turn up the gas a little. You may find the stairs dark, and I would not willingly disappoint your friend the hangman. Good-night."

To all this Signor Malfi answered not one word, and Mark, closing the door behind him, set his eye to the narrow crevice at the top of the lower panel and watched his burly figure as he went down-stairs. Then, after a little pause, he drew out his keys, and stealthily and silently unlocked the door of the next set of rooms. The signor, Mark reflected, might still be listening. He was out of sight and hearing after the first turn in the stone staircase, and Mark was disposed to be wary after what had happened.

Caterina slipped toward him out of the darkness like a ghost. She was pallid with cold as well as fear, and when

she opened her lips to speak, Mark laid a finger on his own and motioned her in silence to the sitting-room.

"He is gone?" she asked in a terror-stricken whisper as she crouched above the fire.

"He is gone," Mark answered, slipping back the toy revolver into its drawer and seating himself calmly.

"Mark," she said, "he is dangerous. What shall I do? How dare I return to him? He knows that I was here."

"He thinks so," said Mark, tranquilly, lighting a new cigarette at the fire of the old one.

"Marco," said the signora, turning on her knees before him, "you are very cold to me." Mark shrugged his shoulders and smoked. "Give me a kind word, Marco, after all this danger for your sake."

"My dear child," said Mark, quietly, "love-making is a very pretty pastime, without doubt. But in this case I scarcely care for it. I was never of a romantic turn of mind, and as I grow older I grow more matter-of-fact. I care more for peace and a quiet mind than I used to do."

The signora still kneeling before him glanced at his face keenly with a miserably hungry look growing upon her own. This cynical and heartless young man had somehow reached to what heart she had. After all, it does come to most people at one time or another to pin a heart to somebody, to set soul and faith and purpose all on some one creature. And sooner or later, except to the very happiest (and the truest) the golden dream grows gray, and faith is seen misplaced—your kohinoors and emeralds of Candahar are profitless pebbles and beads of glass, and you break your heart or turn stupid according to your nature. Take the world round and it is probable enough that love is a vice of the blood, and a permission of the will, much oftener than the romancist cares to fancy. And yet love reigns, and is king of all the passions still, and will be till the whole world's summers have deceased.

It was never profitable to tell some sorts of stories, which are now happily (by growth of civilization, taste, and heart) grown quite unprintable in England. It would serve no purpose worth serving to tell the story of the Signora Caterina Malfi here. It had been in the main an evil story, though, as it affected her until now, not by any means a sad one—and all through, most unwomanly wom-

anly. Probably, until she met Mark Carroll she had never known that she had a heart at all, and he was but a poor god before whom to throw it when she found it. But you must allow sincerity of worship in the blindest idolater. Have there been no raptures of uplifted spirits before the ugly and foolish gods of India, and Egypt, and Great Britain?

A pure life is much for a man. For a woman it is almost everything. It would be but a poor service to Caterina and her like if her historian should paint her as having a love as worthy to bestow as another woman might offer. And yet it was all she had, and the first she had known of goodness and purity. Everything is comparative, and in this case the purity of womanly passion was all the more amazing by contrast with previous old experiences.

"Is love-making no more than a pastime, Marco?" she asked. She had been terribly frightened, but a great fear will fly before a greater. Nothing the swarthy signor could do could hurt her like a doubt of Mark. Mark shrugged his shoulders and went on smoking. "Is love no more than a pastime, Marco," she asked again, "with you and me?"

"My child," said he, placidly dispelling a little cloud of smoke by a wave of his hand, "the play is played out. We will close the box and put up the puppets. You don't know Thackeray, do you?" he asked in English, with an attempt at a smile.

"The play is played out?" she asked. "Marco, you do not mean you do not love me? That we—"

"Love," said Mark, "is a charming word, and in its way a charming thing. But it has a tender and delicate life, and often dies early. In plain Italian, my good Caterina, I am not going to run the chance of finding an Italian dagger in my ribs to oblige any lady, however charming she may be."

"Well," she said, with wonderful quiet, "tell me everything. Say all you have to say."

"There's a sensible girl," said Mark. "We go our ways, my dear, that's all: you yours, I mine. As for love, I have loved a time or two before this, and shall love again. And so I fancy have you, and so will you again."

He expected tears and protestations, in accordance with the history of old days. He had seen that sort of thing be-

fore, and disliked it excessively because it bored him. But Caterina only rose to her feet and confronted him silently.

"You have some little toilet to make," said Mark, pointing to the boots and hat and mantle which all lay together in a disorderly heap upon the carpet. "Whilst you make it I will see if the coast is clear. I am not altogether certain but that our musical friend is waiting round the corner with a carving-knife in readiness for both of us."

She said not a word, and he pulled on his shoes and overcoat, took his hat and gloves from the table, and with a word to say that he would return in a moment, left her. She heard the door close, and listened to his step until it grew inaudible, but she never moved until he came back again.

"He has resigned the chase, Caterina," said he as he re-entered. "I am afraid he will be unamiable when you meet, but you have had experience of him long ago, and you will know how to manage him. Not ready yet? Do not allow me to disturb you. I am in no haste."

"You mean all this?" she asked, slowly and quietly. "You can cast me off like this? You could swear for a month or two that you love me, and could take all I had left to give, and then throw me away because you are afraid to hold me?"

"I thought I had explained it all quite clearly," said Mark.

"You could look so like truth," she said, "and yet be such a liar."

"My good Caterina," he answered, "you and I, who know the world, are wise enough by this time, and experienced enough to understand each other."

"You swore," she said, "that you loved me."

"And you that you loved me," said Mark. "And we agreed to believe each other."

"And you never loved me?"

"My dear," he cried, "you are a very charming and accomplished woman. Even without permanent beauty your understanding would make you irresistible. Even without wit your beauty would conquer anything with a heart inside. I recognized your intellect and I did homage to your beauty. I do both still. But I am something of a philosopher, Caterina, and I am apt to weigh the value of a thing to me before I pay a price for it."

"And love is not worth the price? You are afraid of Tito?"

"I am not afraid of anybody," he answered, with the same calm and flippant tone. "But I am not a fool, at least," he added with a laugh, "I am not fool enough to pay so much for—"

"So little?" she asked, filling up the pause.

"Precisely," he responded. "Although for gallantry's sake I searched for a prettier phrase."

"You mean," she said, "that I am and have been no more to you than any other woman you may find? That I have been a month's toy to you, and nothing more?"

"My child," said Mark, a little fretfully, "I don't want to say a lot of things that are unconventional, and—true: unless you force me. We have played out our play very pleasantly, and I am heartily sorry that the curtain falls so soon. But I—you know—I am a battered old man of the world, so young as I look, and you have had experiences. Let us do justice to ourselves and to each other. Let us recognize the hand of the inevitable, and part in peace."

"Marco," she said, "it will be bitter to have to hate you."

"Then why try to do it?" he asked. "I don't hate you because I have to part from you, and you have as good a reason for leaving me as I have for leaving you."

"And I have loved you!" she said, with such a bitterness and intensity in her quiet tones that he began to be half afraid of her, and to think her made of some other metal than he had fancied. "You! I have lived all these years in the world without loving anybody, and I must needs love you at the end of it all. Ah, well, Marco! I am going now, and you may think that you have done with me. You thought Tito dangerous, you poor coward, because a woman said so. You will find me more dangerous than Tito."

Mark laughed softly and took another cigarette. Passion does not always show itself in romantic ways, and the signora sat calmly down and drew on her discarded boots, arranged her hair before the glass, tied on her hat, and adjusted her mantle and her gloves, all in the most business-like quietude.

"I thought I had found a man at last," she said then,

facing round upon him, "and I gave him all the heart I had to give. I would have loved you like a dog. I would have let you beat me and starve me for a word of love a year."

"My dear," said Mark, "you prepare the way for your antithesis most eloquently. You are going to say that you hate me now, as well as you ever loved me, are you not?"

"I am going to say," she cried, "that I will repay you."

"For what?" asked Mark. "You have really cost me very little."

"I will repay you," she said again. "I will repay you. And now let me go if you please. I can not kill you here, but I will bide my time."

"I am reprieved for awhile, then," Mark answered, leading the way to the door. "Good-bye, Caterina. I am really very sorry to have to say it, but when you come to think, you will see how much wiser it is for both. Good-bye."

"You!" she cried, flashing suddenly upon him with a vivid and terrible passion in her face and voice. "You! To have thrown a heart away on you!"

"An error, Caterina!" Mark answered, "a fatal error."

"Yes," she said, with sudden quiet, "a fatal error. Let me pass. Good-night."

He stood awhile to watch her as she went slowly down the stairs. She was undeniably a fine woman, and he was sorry enough to lose her.

"Like most of those southern women," he said; "she has a bit of the tiger in her. I wonder, Mark, if your unworthy person excited any real passion in her—there is such a thing unless all men and books do lie, and most of them do—or whether she wanted a little bit of play-acting at the finish. I hope at least," he concluded with a laugh, "that she won't carry melodrama into action. I shall be out of the frying-pan into the fire indeed if I have a pair of daggers waiting for me instead of one."

This prospect so tickled him that whilst he washed his hands and face and dressed for the streets, he chuckled half a dozen times about it. The signora with a resolute step marched westward in the meantime, and the signor, standing in the shadow of Temple Bar, saw her emerge from the Temple archway, and followed in her footsteps.

CHAPTER XI.

It is not easy to believe that there were many better men in the world than Mr. Anthony Bethesda. It is certain that there were few indeed whose outer man bore so plain a sign of inward virtue. He had a large and well-formed body, plump but not corpulent; a large and well-formed head, and large and well-formed features. He was not in holy-orders. But he looked as though no other line of life were appropriate to him, and he wore black clothes of the usual low church-clerical or dissenting-ministerial cut. His white tie was large and spotless. His fat hands caressed one another, and his face was an index to his heart. It was rarely to be seen without a smile upon it—a smile humble and benevolent—a smile which said distinctly "God forgive me," and in the very same curve of lip and eyelid, "The Lord bless *you*, my Christian brother."

This good man worshiped at a large, square-built chapel in the south of London, and was by all accounted a shining light and a model of the Christian virtues.

Taking his walks abroad one London autumn morning, Mr. Bethesda saw in the near neighborhood of his favorite chapel a big van discharging furniture at the door of a little house. A florid, gray-haired man of country aspect was superintending the unloading, and a middle-aged woman of decent middle-class exterior was assisting a very pretty girl in the porterage of light articles from the big van to the little house. Mr. Bethesda paused a moment to look on with an aspect of benevolent interest. No man need search his mind for apologies on the ground that he finds it pleasant to look at youth and beauty, and Mr. Bethesda was a widower and old enough to be the girl's father. At that hour of the day this outlying London street was very quiet. From half-past seven to half-past eight in the morning it was always lively enough, except on Sundays, and brisk enough again from six to seven in the evening, for at those times the tide of clerks and shop-men ebbed and flowed. At other hours the policeman, the baker, the costermonger, the postman, and the muffin-man came along to break the stillness of a desert solitude.

Apart from those who were personally concerned with the big van, Mr. Bethesda was the only creature in the street, and he was therefore noticeable. The pretty girl, with her hair escaping somewhat from its confining net, a flush of clear color on her face, and a pleased excitement in her eyes, was emerging from the door-way, when she caught the good man's smile. Her face clouded curiously, and turning abruptly, she withdrew into the house. Mr. Bethesda lingered for a moment longer. He had more than a fatherly eye for a nice-looking girl, had Mr. Bethesda, and perhaps the young woman might return. Whilst he stood there the two men in charge of the van lugged to the mouth of it, with infinite trouble, a great old-fashioned wardrobe of black oak, and attempted to lower it to the ground. The weight was too much for them, and they called for help. The gray, florid man emerged from the house and lent a pair of hands.

"It is a Christian duty to help a neighbor," said Mr. Bethesda, advancing.

"So I've heard," replied the florid man, dryly, with an odd, distrustful sideway look at him.

"Allow me," said the good man, either not observing or disregarding the other's manner.

Nobody objected to his assistance, and he lifted as strongly as the rest. The pretty girl was visible at the end of the passage, and it was evident that she took a keen interest in this proceeding. It is curious to notice how little will interest people who have not seen much of the world.

The ponderous old oak wardrobe was a fair weight even for four men to carry, and Mr. Bethesda was red in the face as he tottered at his own corner. Suddenly there was a trip, a stagger, and a cry. The gray-haired, florid man was down upon his back on the stone pavement; the man who had shared the load at that end was on his knees, and the weight had fallen with a sickening crash upon the prostrate figure.

"Father!" shrieked the girl, running forward. The man made no response. They moved the weight from his body and bore him in-doors, but not before that part of the street was crowded with people who had suddenly sprung from nowhere. Mr. Bethesda entered with the two men of the van, but he seemed as helpless as the rest, and could do nothing but gape and stare with fatuous "dear me's."

Somebody ran for a doctor, and brought him elbowing his way through the crowd. A poliçeman, sprung from nowhere like the rest, stationed himself at the door and kept off intruders.

"Ladies," said the doctor to the distracted girl and no less distracted mother, "I must ask you to retire for the moment. You can be of use, perhaps," turning to Mr. Bethesda. "Officer close that door, and drive those fools away. Now."

The women waited in the hall outside the closed door, wringing their hands or holding to each other, and the minutes crawled like hours. When at last the doctor confronted them he was grave and had little to say. The injured man was still unconscious. It would be best to take him to the hospital. He would receive completer attention there than elsewhere.

Both the wife and daughter fought against this and would hear nothing of it. What could be done was done, and Mrs. Moore and her daughter Azubah sat down to watch the mainstay of the house to see if haply he could ever be so patched again as to prop their humble roof-tree any more.

This was Michael Moore's London home-coming, and to be brief about a mournful business, the outcome of it was that the hale farmer was crippled for life, and Mr. Anthony Bethesda became the household guide, philosopher, and friend.

The farmer mended slowly, and his wife and daughter had deceptive hopes of him, but he never got further toward health and strength than to sit in a Bath-chair to be wheeled about the streets on sunny afternoons. Now sickness, more than any other form of domestic extravagance, makes inroads upon the purse, and the four or five hundred pounds the farmer had saved out of the wreck of his affairs began to melt with terrible rapidity. When the Bath-chair was bought and the doctors were paid the two women sat down above the scanty accounts and looked at each other with foreboding faces.

"'Zubah," said the mother, beginning to cry and to embrace her daughter, "what can we do? What *can* we do?" The girl offered no answer. "We can just manage to live for a year, perhaps, and there's your father can never do a hand's turn again, and what can we do at the

end of it? I'm afraid as you'll have to go out to service, my dear, though I never looked forrads to any of ours coming down so low as that. Miss Lording 'ud give you a place to be her maid, 'Zubah, and that 'ud be something *off* our shoulders." Still the girl made no response. "I'm afraid, 'Zubah, as your pride'll never let you do that till you're forced to it."

"My pride will not stand in my way, mother," said Azubah, quietly, "but I can not help you and father by going into service. What are you to do when the year is over?"

"Perhaps Squire Carroll 'ud help us," said the poor woman.

"Mother," said the girl, "haven't you heard father say over and over again that he wouldn't accept a favor at Mr. Carroll's hands? We must help ourselves."

"And now," said Mrs. Moore, "my own child's a-turning contrairy."

"No, no, dear," answered her daughter, in a tone half soothing and half authoritative. "We must be honorable, and we must support ourselves. I shall find something to do in less than a year which will keep us all."

"Lord o' mercy!" cried the mother, "what can *you* do to keep us all?"

"I have done something already, mother," said Azubah. "Not much, but something—a beginning. There is a paid choir at St. John's Church, and I saw an advertisement for a soprano—a treble, you know—and I answered it yesterday morning, and the curate heard me sing. He has the management of the choir, and he engaged me. It's not much, but twelve pounds a year is better than nothing at all, and it may lead to other things. There will be church concerts, and if I sing at them I am to have a guinea each time. I didn't tell you before, dear, because I wanted to surprise you."

"My dear," said the mother, "you'll never ha' the courage to sing afore a churchful of folks."

"Oh, yes," answered Azubah, tranquilly. "It was very unpleasant to have to sing to a stranger yesterday. But the more people there are to sing to, the easier it is. And, mother, another reason why I didn't tell you was that I wanted the first quarter's money to pay for singing-lessons."

"My dear, my dear!" cried the mother, "we can't afford no such toying with Providence. We want to keep every penny we can get."

"Mother," said the girl, "you remember young Mr. Carroll?"

"Surely."

"You know how much he knew about music, and he always told me that if I liked to practice I would make a singer. I must try."

"Your uncle Joshua had a lovely counter-tenor in his day," said Mrs. Moore, who was a readily hopeful and easily desponding woman, "an' your grandmother used to sing tribble in the old church at Overhill so as you could hear her all over the buildin'. The voice is a gift, and it runs in families. That's a thing as has been well understood always. A voice is a gift as runs in families."

"Mother," said the girl, anxiously, "I feel so sure of being able to do something in that way for father and yourself, and there is so little time to be lost. I could go on improving all the time if you could let me have a little money to pay for lessons now instead of waiting a quarter of a year. I can pay you back again. There will be concerts at the church schools, and if I sing well they may lead to people asking me to sing at others. I will work hard, dear; I will indeed."

The mother shook her head, but the denial was feeble, and her easily hopeful soul began to conjure up visions of her daughter as a great lady—almost like Jenny Lind, who was the one singer of note she had ever heard of.

"Here is an advertisement," said the girl, passing a rapid finger over the columns of a newspaper; "the advertisement of an Italian lady, signora—signora—oh, here it is, Signora Malfi. Italians are always the best teachers, and Signora Malfi's terms are only five shillings for a lesson of an hour."

"Lord o' mercy!" cried the good woman a second time, "five shillings for an hour's squalling! Does she think folks are made o' money?"

But the daughter was the stronger, and the stronger won, as usual. Mr. Anthony Bethesda, who brought his Christian smile into the house with him before the settlement was half an hour old, was consulted on the question.

"I had not known it was so bad as this, dear friends,"

said Mr. Bethesda; "I would that I had known it earlier. There is a friend who keeps an office for registration in the City, and I would willingly have applied to him. There are temptations in the life upon which our sister proposes to embark."

It was a pity, but Azubah could not be brought to endure Mr. Bethesda, and whilst he was talking she left the room. The girl was eager and enthusiastic, disposed to do everything she set about at once, and mightily scornful of the advice of people she did not like. Her heart was her judgment, and that, perhaps, was something of a pity also. Where she loved, she trusted the loved one's opinion—there had never been anybody quite so wise as her father—where she disliked, the wisdom of Solomon would have looked unwise. If Mr. Bethesda thought ill of her scheme, the fact was almost a recommendation to it. It was at least an incentive to go on with it.

Azubah marched straight out of the house with the Signora Malfi's address in her purse, and very little else there. By dint of patient inquiry and one or two ominous changes, she reached the signora's residence, saw the lady, made terms, and actually took lesson Number One at once. The signora took the five shillings, and allowed her to carry away the bravura to study between lessons. It was then that Tom and Mark had seen her.

Whether the Italian young woman taught the English girl much that was of service to her is an open question, but the pupil worked devotedly, and made great progress. She was surprised at first to find that Mr. Bethesda had business at the West End of London, but by and by she became used to seeing him, and even to accepting his casual escort home. There was not a doubt that Mr. Bethesda was a very good man, but it happens often in this topsy-turvy world that the naughty people are lovable, whilst the good are not, and somehow the girl and Mr. Bethesda made little progress toward friendship. Now, the signora, who was not good, got on much better with Azubah, and began to take quite a motherly sort of interest in her, when, without warning of any sort, the musical student, calling at Signor Malfi's lodgings with intent to take the customary lesson, learned that the signora had disappeared—had left England, said the landlady.

Azubah being one of those young women who do all

things enthusiastically or not at all, had been full of day-dreams on her journey. But for those day-dreams it is pretty certain that she would never have struggled at all, for it was her truest nature to lie still to dream. They drew her on, however—pictures of full houses listening and murmurs of full-lauded plaudits, years away as yet, and pictures of mother and father happily provided for and beyond the reach of care. The refusal at Signor Malfi's door quite froze the genial current of her soul, and the step which had been elastic in ascending went down the steps slow and leaden, and took her dispiritedly to the corner of the street.

"Miss Moore," said a voice there, and Azubah, looking up, saw the signora. "They told you I was gone away?" she asked.

"Yes," said the girl, in amazement.

"I have quarreled," said the signora, "with my husband. It will all be soon over, and I am not angry any more. He is angry yet. He is, like Italians, hot and jealous. I knew you would come, and I did not want you to be disappointed, and I had not your address. Therefore I came, and I am glad I saw you."

Azubah was instantaneously certain that the signora had been shamefully wronged. She was very glad to meet the swarthy lady, and shook hands with her warmly. What wretches men were, to be sure!

"I dare not let Tito see me now," said the signora. "I am living half a mile away If you will come to me I will give you your lessons."

She would go certainly and help to defy Tito and all his works. Five shillings a week was not much, but it was something, and she at least could be loyal to a woman in distress. The signora was voluble in broken-English on the way, and the girl's heart warmed at the recital of her wrongs.

"I will go upon the stage," said Caterina, "in a while, and there I can keep myself. A lady can keep always herself upon the stage."

They were in the new rooms by this time in a house in the neighborhood of Pimlico. The furniture, which had been extremely pretentious and gaudy, was dirty and dilapidated now. A white velvet hearth-rug with embroidered roses on it was turned up at the corners and its flowers

were frayed, and its whiteness was lost in innumerable stains of footsteps, ink, and wine. The mantel-shelf was clothed in ruby velvet, but the pile was mangy, and rubbed threadbare at the edges of the shelf as if by lounging shoulders. A man of the world would have known and read the signs of the place at a glance—but what was a girl of eighteen, country-bred, to guess about them?

"But you can not play in English," said Azubah, in answer to Caterina's last speech.

"I shall sing," said Caterina. She flung the piano open and began a vocal storm, shrieking through trills and melodies with amazing volume and shrillness. Azubah had never been at all inclined up to now to lay bare her hopes and desires to anybody, but there was that in the signora's apparent helplessness and her loneliness, and most of all in her ambitions, which prompted the girl for the first time in her life to make a *confidante*. So when the shrieking melodies and trills were done with, she spoke and told her own story.

"You will sing well," cried the signora, "when you have had more lessons. It is not harder for two than it is for one. We will learn duettos and sing them at the concerts together. You are white, and pale, and sorrowful, you little English flower," she said, kissing Azubah, emphatically, "and now it is plain the reason why. And you are good, and that is why I like you."

A week earlier the girl would have resented Caterina's caresses almost as much as those of a man, but now the signora was in trouble and Azubah's heart warmed to her. Besides, this promise seemed to open up a way to her ambitions. The whole afternoon was spent in practice, and when the five shillings came to be paid, the Italian woman took them lingeringly as though she would fain refuse them.

When Azubah paid her next visit a little fat man with a bald head, ruddy lips, and heavy eyes sat in the signora's sitting-room listening to her as she sung.

"This is my lady friend," said the signora, bouncing from the piano when her song was done, and embracing Azubah vehemently. "This, my child, is Mistare Moss, he is of the—how do you say, Mistare Moss?"

"The Megatherium," said Mr. Moss, turning the m's into b's.

"It is very good place to sing at," said Caterina, "is it not, Mistare Moss?"

"It's one of the best in London," said Mr. Moss, nosily. "It's not so long established as some of 'em, but what we want there is genuine talent. We're open to give genuine talent a start in almost any direction."

"Let my lady friend sing," said the signora. "Then we will sing a duetto together." She turned to Azubah. "Let Mr. Moss hear you."

Azubah took off her gloves and sat down at the piano with a beating heart. What did she know? The Megatherium Concert Hall was quite outside her experiences, and the gentleman said it was one of the best places to sing at in London. Through him might lie the avenue to fortune. Her fingers touched the keys firmly and lightly. The piano had seen its best days certainly, but it was fairly in tone, and its voice gave her new confidence. She began to sing—"As pants the hart for cooling streams when heated in the chase." The signora listened doubtfully and glanced at Mr. Moss.

"Very dice, biss," said Mr. Moss. "Very dice indeed, but not the Begatheriub style. We don't go id for religious busic there. Try agaid. Subthig lighter if you please —subthig operatic."

Azubah's more familiar music was mostly antiquated, and after the signora she was afraid to try the something operatic. Her own mellow and liquid sounding tones fell on the ear with double sweetness after the shrill notes of Caterina's voice, but she did not guess that, and was afraid of being overmatched. So she chose Barnett's old-fashioned "Rise, gentle moon," and sung it so well that Mr. Moss applauded softly.

"Yes, biss," he said, "that will do. Try agaid. A ballad is the sort of thing to suit you, I fadcy. Try a ballad." She tried a ballad. "Not quite the stage style," said Mr. Moss. "A little broader and then you'll do. A leetle broader. Well, ladies, I shall have no objection to give you an opportunity. You can have a week begiddig on Bonday dext, two turns apiece. Thed if you suit us we can talk about terms afterward. The opening," he continued, "is valuable, of course, but we don't ask for anything in the way of premiub. We give you a chadce od your berits."

Whether Mr. Moss were a gentleman or not Azubah could not tell. He was not in the least like Squire Carroll, or his son Tom, or the vicar, or the curate at Overhill, or Mr. Lording, the father of her old patroness and friend. He wore a prodigious deal of jewelry, and he was not particularly clean about the hands, but little as the girl knew, she had heard that artists were often untidy. Mr. Moss no doubt mixed much with artists, even if he himself were not of the brotherhood, and perhaps he had caught their manners and customs. And how fortunate she herself was to have found such a chance so soon! If she succeeded—oh, if she *only* could succeed! father and mother need never want for anything. Her fortune was made and theirs along with it. The signora was confident of taking the world by storm now that she had at last secured an opportunity for making her voice heard. Opera managers all over Europe had been blind to the treasure they had thrown away. Whatever faults Tito had, he could sing, and he knew what singing should be. Tito had always been indignant at the blindness of the managers.

Arrangements were completed with business-like brevity, and Azubah found herself pledged to sing nightly for a week before an audience of whom she knew nothing. The signora had earned the right to kiss her and to be friendly with her, having secured her this unexampled piece of good fortune. But the girl's head was turning, and her heart was beating with it all as she went home that evening.

"You oughtn't to be going out at night alone, my dear," said her mother anxiously, when she heard the news. "And yet your father isn't in a case to be left for an hour."

"Signora Malfi is going as well," said Azubah. "I shall be quite safe with her."

"Signora Malfi" sounded grandly on the unsophisticated country woman's ears, and Mrs. Moore knew already that Signor Malfi was or had been a singer at her Majesty's Opera, and naturally set him down as being somehow on the royal staff, and more or less intimately associated with the queen herself. So that the association of her daughter with these high personages was altogether a thing to be thankful for. Not that she thought much of foreigners as a rule, but her Majesty's foreigners were necessarily superior to the crowd.

The girl had little difficulty with her mother, who was more proud than anxious, but she had many tremors in her own behalf. The wished-for, dreaded night came at last, and she hastened to the signora's rooms, there to dress by appointment. Caterina, with bare arms and shoulders glittering with powder, stood aghast at the plainness of her *protégée's* attire; but it was too late to change it, even if Azubah had had the wardrobe of a princess—which she had not.

The signora, with all her finery carefully shawled, led the way and called a four-wheeler, and the two were driven to the Megatherium stage-door. Mr. Moss's duties happening to have called him there at that moment, he received them.

"Good-eveding, ladies. Glad to see you. You can have a dressing-roob betweed you to-borrow. I'll see to it. Come this way."

It was all unaccustomed and strange to Azubah, who began to feel curiously nervous and elevated by turns. The dust, the dirt, the bare unplastered walls, the slips of scenery, lines of rope, coils of gas tubing, the *olla podrida* of stage odds and ends made an unpleasant impression upon her. She had never so much as read a description of the view behind the scenes, and had expected something like a vestry at church or a school committee-room to wait in. There was the sound of a big band from the front, and in the frowsy green-room a man and woman in grotesque attire and painted faces awaited their call. In a minute the tones of the band softened down and a rancorous voice began to sing. The voice and the tune were things to shudder at, but the words were indistinguishable. After frequent repetitions of the air the voice ceased, and a great noise of applause was heard and a young man put in his head at the door-way and nodded familiarly at the grotesquely dressed couple. This young man was in evening dress, and his lower man looked passable, but he wore a fiery red wig and his face was painted in exaggerated semblance of a drunkard's.

"See you at Bobboi's, sha'n't I?" he asked. "I've sent the orfice to Bill and Judy. Ta-tar."

Altogether, except for the near neighborhood of the band, it was extremely unlike an evening concert, and Azubah was puzzled and dispirited.

"The Deutchers!" cried a small boy, thrusting his ragged head under the young man's arm. The grotesquely dressed people passed out, and the band began again. The Deutchers appeared to score a great success, for they returned twice to the stage, amid resounding plaudits. Again Azubah heard the voices, and was inclined to think but little of the vocal powers of the singers at the Megatherium. Was it at all the place Mr. Moss had represented it as being?

"Snorer Cateriner!" cried the ragged-headed boy, when the Deutchers had completed their third ditty. The signora arose and slipped her shawl from her gleaming shoulders. As she passed through the door-way another figure or two appeared—one a lady in tights and a remarkably short dress, another a lady in appropriate concert costume. Azubah listened for her friend's voice and heard it shriller and higher and louder than ever, ringing through the place to the accompaniment of a piano. There was a noise of applause at the close of her song, and she swept radiant to the door of the greenroom, nodded, and swept back again. She sung a second time, and the applause was louder than before. Then, after a long interval, during which the band played the same air over and over again monotonously to the sole accompaniment so far as Azubah's ears could tell her of an irregular thumping upon the platform, the ragged-headed boy made another appearance.

"Mam'selle Mora," said the boy.

"Go," said Caterina, pushing her gently. "That is you. Here is your first song. Why do you shake so? Go. I will come with you."

There were other people in the room again, and the signora spoke in a whisper. Azubah obeyed her, and almost before she knew it found herself upon a stage with a row of footlights in front which, for the first moment or two, obscured the hall beyond. She heard a piano playing the overture to "Rise, Gentle Moon," and in due time she began to sing. At the end of the first verse a man rapped vigorously with a hammer upon a table, and there was a faint scattered sound of applause about the hall. Then her sight came to her, and she saw a crowded auditorium, in which men sat smoking and drinking. It was not what she had looked to find, and she felt debased and degraded,

but at least she would not break down before all these people. She took up the air at the due time, and sung again as she had never dared to sing before. The place seemed so vast to her that she dared, for the first time in her life, to give her voice full scope. She disdained the people, and she hated herself for being there. She would not strain her power by a thread's breath to please them, but the freedom of the long and lofty hall invited her, and, half to her own amazement, her voice filled it with sound. The applause at the end of the second verse was considerable, and in spite of her disdain and disappointment at the place and people, she was conscious of a sense of elation as she walked from the stage with an answering salute. It was by pure accident that she went off on the right side, and met the signora in the flies.

"Mademoiselle Mora will appear again," said a loud voice, and the tapping on the table began again.

"Your music," whispered the signora, thrusting one roll into her hand and taking away the other. "Go. They are ready for you."

She walked proudly back with the music clinched tightly in her gloved hand. She had been tricked into coming here, though she scarcely knew whom to blame; yet, being here, she would not fail. The pianist began "The Banks of Allan Water," and she sung the first verse with conscious power. But as she opened her lips for the second she saw directly beneath and before her a face familiar from childhood, and this so froze her that the musician had to try back again. The face she had seen was Mark Carroll's, and her eyes roving helplessly from his recognizing gaze encountered another glance—Tom Carroll's, this time. It would have been bitter enough to have been seen there by anybody who knew her when Michael Moore had held his head high in the world, but to be met there by him, and to be hopeless of telling him by what an error she came there, seemed for the moment a thing too shameful to be borne. The pianist was nearing the note once more, and she nerved herself to the task and struggled through the song. She knew that she was singing badly, that she was out of time and tune, and she was prepared for the ominous silence which met her at the close.

"You'll do better to-morrow," said Mr. Moss, kindly enough, as she quitted the stage.

"I think it right to tell you, sir," she answered quietly, "that I shall not be here to-morrow. Signora Malfi," flashing round upon her with widening eyes and clinched hands, "how dared you bring me to a place like this?"

"Moore was a very proud fellow," Tom was saying to his cousin. "He would never have allowed the girl to appear in a place like this unless something had happened to him. I must hunt him up."

"Oh," said Mark, carelessly, "I suppose the signora brought her here. She doesn't sing badly. It's a bit of an adventure, though, to find two lady acquaintances on the Megatherium stage in one evening. Malfi has kicked the charming Caterina out, I suppose," he added to himself. "That is my fault, and does me an honor of which I am hardly worthy. It's a very appropriate line of life for her, and she'll do well at it. These dunderheads fancy she can sing. The little girl's worth fifty of her. Mark, I think you must look up the playmate of your childhood. She's growing absolutely pretty."

CHAPTER XII.

When Mark turned after these reflections his cousin Tom had disappeared.

"He'll be back to see Léonie," said Mark, and thought no more about it. Mademoiselle Léonie (*née* Mrs. Whitehouse) was attracting all London, more or less, by her midair somersault in full flight from one trapeze bar to another, and Tom and Mark were there to see her. The performance came on, and in due time was over, and Tom had not returned. In point of fact, Tom had found other business. He was always a bit of a Quixote, and the sight of his old playfellow on a music-hall stage seemed to speak so plainly of some sort of misfortune that he went out at once to find out what the misfortune was, and, if it might be, to alleviate it.

"You can't go in, sir," said the keeper of the stage-door, with inflexible aspect.

"Take in my card to Miss Moore," said Tom, and at a half-crown presented with the card the door-keeper grew suddenly flexible, and obeyed. Tom followed in his footsteps, and by and by came upon a scene of quarrel, in

which the persons concerned were the signora and Mr. Moss.

"You cad say what you like," cried Mr. Moss, "it's all the sabe to me. It's the pridciple of the thig I go for. The yug woman's billed for a week, ad she'll have to appear for a week. She aid't ady particular catch neither, but I'm goig to stick to the bargain."

Azubah, with an extremely white face, was trying to get past Mr. Moss, and Mr. Moss by much adroit dodging frustrated her at every move.

"Allow the lady to pass, if you please," said Tom, in a tone a shade too decided to sound civil to a stranger. Mr. Moss regarded him angrily, and demanded to know who he was and how he came there. These inquiries were presented with more than necessary emphasis, and accompanied by some grossnesses of expression which were part of Mr. Moss's common conversational stock in trade. They sounded horrible to the gentleman, used as they were in the presence of women. "Stand aside," cried Tom. "Allow me, Miss Moore." His command to Mr. Moss was enforced by a strong but quiet hand; the girl took the protecting arm and clung to it, as she and Tom moved together toward the stairs which led to the street door. The manager in a fury declared that the intruder should repent this, and roared for a policeman. Then running forward, he stood half way down the stairs to intercept Tom's exit, and a most unfortunate thing happened. Mr. Moss standing there bellowing blasphemy and blocking the way so incensed Tom Carroll that he took him by the collar and swung him down such of the stairs as still remained to be traversed.

At this Tom was seized from behind, and a dreadful hubbub arose, Mr. Moss holding his nose and cursing through it, the signora shrieking from the top of the stairs, and the whole available talent of the Megatherium Concert Hall swelling the chorus which accompanied this duet. In the middle of it all somebody brought a policemen, and the noise redoubled, and somehow, when Tom had tendered his card, they all surged out together into the street, Azubah still clinging to her too-impetuous protector's arm, frightened and white, but for all that self-possessed and silent.

The card was not enough. "It was evident," said the

policeman, "that a serious assault had been committed, and the gentleman must come to the station." On his own authority the policeman could not let the gentleman go.

Things began to look exceedingly unpleasant for Tom, but having got himself into the position, he bore it as well as he could, demanded a cab, which was brought with difficulty through the crowd, saw Azubah into it, paid the cabman his fare beforehand, and then finding another hansom for himself and the policeman, submitted to be driven to the station, leaving Mr. Moss to follow. The district police-office being very near at hand, he had the satisfaction of being followed by a score or two of the onlookers.

Mr. Moss appeared with his nose bleeding, and his charge against Tom was that he had forced his way through the stage-door, and had there, without provocation, grievously assaulted him—Mr. Moss. To this Tom answered coldly and contemptuously with a statement of the facts, and again proffered his card. The inspector regretted that he could not accept that as a sufficient guarantee of the gentleman's identity, and offered an alternative suggestion. Mr. Carroll might either go home, accompanied by a policeman, who would be instructed to ascertain the accuracy or non-accuracy of his professed address, or he might send for a friend who would become surety for his appearance on the morrow.

All this was more and more unpleasant to a sensitive youngster who had gone out to relieve distress and had met with so poor a reward for good intentions, and Tom was naturally indignant at it. But he made shift to control himself and to write a brief note to his cousin Mark, whom he described so particularly to the officer that that functionary had no difficulty in finding him at the place at which Tom had left him. He glanced at the note and rose tranquilly.

"What is the matter?" he asked, on reaching the street. The official told the story as he knew it. "Nonsense," said Mark decisively. "Mr. Carroll is one of the best-tempered and gentlest fellows in the world. He must have received great provocation."

Mr. Mark Carroll, of Pump Court, Temple, barrister-at-law, having identified his cousin, and having become surety for his appearance, Tom was released, and went his way

much perturbed. Mark accompanied him home, and they talked the matter over on the way.

"You'll get a solicitor to instruct me, as a matter of form," said Mark, "and I'll defend the case. All these fellows are servants of Mr. Moss, and they'll lie of course till they're black in the face. Your only witnesses are the two women. I shall have a chance of airing my Italian with signora." He laughed at that fancy. It was certainly an odd chance which would throw them together in a police court as barrister and witness. Tom broke in on the current of his thoughts.

"You don't suppose, Mark, that I am going to drag that poor little girl's name into an affair like this?"

"Good gracious!" cried Mark. "Why not? She is your principal witness. Moss's men will all swear what Moss wants them to swear—that's human nature. The poor devils have to live one way or another, and a little perjury is all in the day's work when it's wanted. Your case is this. Being a person of known benevolence—" there Mark smiled his own pleasant smile—"and observing on the stage of the Megatherium a young lady whose parents were once prosperous tenants on your father's estate (a very good point that father's estate), you arrived at the natural conclusion that her parents are either lost or have fallen into financial difficulties. With that warm-hearted impulsiveness which is known to be your chief characteristic, you go round to the back of the stage to see if you can be of service. You find the young lady being horribly bullied by the manager, why and wherefore we at present know not, and you interfere wildly for her protection. You admit that for a lady's protection you laid your hands upon Mr. Moss. Mr. Moss unfortunately fell down-stairs."

"No," said Tom; "I threw him down-stairs, and he deserved it. If I had broken his neck I should have had no pity for him."

"That would have been manslaughter," said Mark, smilingly. "And, of course, you threw him down-stairs, and no doubt he deserved it. But it is the rule to admit nothing in these cases."

"I shall tell the truth," said Tom, hotly. "I'll have none of your confounded legal lies."

"'Tell the truth and shame the devil,' eh? Well, that's a proverb, and there's some of the wisdom of our

ancestors in it, no doubt. 'Tell the truth and go to the devil' would do for a revised edition. Leave the case to me, Tom. My conscience is a little tougher than your own."

"You want to drag Miss Moore's name into it?" asked Tom, who was not by any means in his usual state of placid good temper.

"My dear fellow," cried Mark, "you can't do without it."

"But I *can* do without it," cried Tom, in great heat, "and I *will* do without it. What does it matter to me? People whose opinion I value know that I am no brawler, and the people whose opinion I don't value can think what they please."

"My dear fellow," began Mark, but Tom stopped him.

"I won't hear any more about it, Mark. I shall go down to-morrow, and what happens will happen. But I will have no lies told or suggested in my behalf, and I won't have the name of poor Moore's daughter dragged into the affair at all."

"You seem tender about poor Moore's daughter," said Mark, with an open sneer. He thought he had never heard of anything so downright foolish as the view Tom took of this business.

"I am tender about Moore's daughter," answered Tom, coldly. "I hope I should be tender about the daughter of any old friend in such a matter."

"Well, now," said Mark, "if Miss Moore is to be left out of the case what brought you there at all? It's a case of wanton and purposeless intrusion at once."

Tom, seeing how untenable his quixotic position was against any reasonable assault, naturally held to it all the more doggedly.

"Well, Tom," said his cousin, "you know how much I like you, but I'm bound to tell you that in this case you are acting like an ass."

"And you," Tom answered, "advise me to act like a cad and a coward."

Mark shrugged his shoulders, and was silent. It was evident that Tom was not in a mood to be reasoned with, and if in this case he chose to act like a fool, one man, at least, had done his duty and had warned him. Mark had no inclination to be a martyr in the case, as he would be

if he offended Tom too far by his interference. Tom was too valuable a friend to be offended lightly, and if he would not be helped out of this awkward scrape he must get out of it by himself as best he could. So the two cousins parted for the night somewhat coolly.

On the morrow they met at the police-office, where, by Mark's interference, one discomfort was spared to the most prominent criminal of the day, and Tom was allowed to take a seat at the table in place of appearing in the dock. Mark had done more than this beforehand. He had met the presiding magistrate once or twice, and had taken advantage of that fact to call upon him early in the morning and to relate his cousin's case.

"My cousin, sir," said Mark, "is the most quixotic fool alive. There is a perfect defense in the case and he will not use it. He has no earthly reason to consider the girl, except that she is the daughter of an old tenant of his father's."

"I must go by the evidence, Mr. Carroll," said the magistrate. "I can't allow myself to be affected by an *ex-parte* statement."

"God forbid," cried Mark, piously. "My only object in calling upon you was to explain the case for my cousin's benefit with you personally, and not in your capacity as magistrate. You are an old acquaintance of his father's, and if any questions are asked and you are able to say on my authority that a complete defense existed, but was not brought forward from motives of exaggerated delicacy—"

"I can refer the inquirers to Mr. Mark Carroll," said the magistrate, and there the conversation ended.

It came to pass that in consequence of Mark's maneuver the magistrate handled Tom gently, and the result was that the misdemeanant was fined ten pounds, which was paid at once, and as a matter of course. And if the affair could have ended there it would have passed off lightly enough. But everybody knows what a hungry interest attaches to matters theatrical in the public mind, and the Megatherium, though not exactly a theater, was next door to it. The one reporter who sat in this particular court, and was paid twopence a line by the daily papers, not for what he wrote, but for what they published, hailed the case as a godsend, and took a keen verbatim note, manifolded it in long-hand, and sent it to every journal in the metrop-

olis. The bills of the evening papers made a special line of the case, and the morning papers headed it, "Unprovoked Assault." The "Mirror" had an indignant article on the shameless indulgence displayed by the magistrate toward the ruffianly defendant, who, without being able to plead even the ordinary excuse of drunkenness, had forced his way into a scene of peaceful business, and, without rhyme or reason, assaulted the manager of the Megatherium in the execution of his duty.

The "Mirror," being a Tory journal of the highest and dryest sort, was naturally on Mr. Carroll's breakfast-table every morning. In its columns Mr. Carroll read the dreadful story, and whilst he sat in a condition of horrified amazement, Lording, who was an earlier riser and had seen the news at breakfast an hour before, came bursting in impetuously.

"This is all some horrible mistake," he said, seeing at a glance that Mr. Carroll had read the news. "Some scoundrel has taken a respectable name. I want you to wire to Tom and demand the truth about the matter."

"I shall go up to town immediately," said Mr. Carroll, ruffling with injured majesty. It would have been bad enough for any father to read such a record of a son, but he suffered in proportion to his pride, and, that being abnormal, so were his pains.

"I will come with you," answered Lording. "Mary knows nothing about the matter, and I have burned the daily papers. If you'll let me write a note here and send one of your men over with it, he can take my horse and leave him."

"Certainly," said Mr. Carroll. He bore the misery of the news firmly and like a man.

Lording wrote a brief note to his daughter, saying that important business called him up to London, and asking that a portmanteau might be sent on to him. He added that Mr. Carroll accompanied him, and that put it into the girl's head at once that something had happened to Tom. She sent a note by the groom who drove back her father's messenger, demanding to know if anything were the matter. Lording, thinking the deceit justifiable, scrawled a hasty line to say that there was nothing on earth to be alarmed at; and he had, indeed, quite persuaded himself that somebody had been impersonating Tom Carroll.

There was nothing easier than to offer a card that belonged to somebody else in an affair of that sort, and Tom had always been so much of a gentleman that it was impossible to think of him as being thus suddenly transformed into a rowdy.

The two elders had no heart for talk as they traveled to London, and a more and more unpleasant dread lest the thing should prove true after all began to settle down on both of them.

"I'll tell you what, Carroll," said Lording, at Euston, "I won't interfere with your talk with the lad. It will be better for you and him to have it out together. I'll go and see Mark. The two are always together, and he's bound to know something about it. If he doesn't I shall follow you to Tom's place, for I can't stand the suspense, and I must know the truth."

"As you will," said Mr. Carroll, frozenly, and they parted on their separate ways.

Lording found Mark at home.

"What's all this in the papers about Tom?" he cried. "Do *you* know anything about it? Is it true?"

"Well," Mark answered, "it is and it isn't."

"Damn it all, man!" cried Lording, "don't offer me riddles. What is it? Tell me what you know."

"Well," said Mark, "there's a lady in the case, and Tom has some high-flown notions about its being dishonorable to put her in the witness-box to clear him."

"A lady in the case?" said Lording, blankly. "Confound him! And confound you, too! Can't you tell a plain tale, and be hanged to you?"

Thus adjured, Mark told the story as he knew it, and Lording breathed freely.

"It's abominably unpleasant, and all that, of course," said the good old boy. "But we who know the lad can trust him, eh, Mark? He's in the right, is Tom, quite in the right. And what on earth can be the matter with poor Moore to let his girl get into a place like that? My daughter's quite savage at the girl not writing to her. She's sent three letters and not had a line in answer. I say, Mark, there must have been a good deal of hard swearing against Tom. Eh!"

"About half a dozen of the witnesses went for flat perjury, according to Tom's story," answered Mark. "I

told him what an ass he was not to have a defense. I could have made those fellows contradict each other a thousand times over. But Tom's a Quixote."

"I like him better for it," said Lording. "As honest-hearted and truthful a lad as breathes. A fine, high-minded, honorable lad, by —, sir! And all the same, it's abominably unpleasant to have these things said of one and not to be able to deny them."

Nothing that happened to other people affected Mark greatly, as a rule, but for once a circumstance outside his own interests almost cost him his temper.

"I'm glad for Tom's sake that you approve of him," he said. "Personally—if my opinion's of any value—I think him the most unmitigated ass in Europe. Look at the pain he gives you," cried Mark, not because he cared for that, but to make good his argument. "Look at the pain he gives his father! And all for a girl for whom he has no business to care a farthing."

"I suppose," said Lording, "he cares no more for her than he has a right to care for her."

"That's his concern," said Mark, ill-temperedly. "You had better ask him." Lording was not a thin-skinned man, and Mark knew when *brusquerie* of manner was harmless to himself, and when it was likely to be harmful. To the people from whom he expected nothing, he could afford to be impolite if it suited him. He was a little sore about this matter of Tom's also, because he had calculated on being employed for the defense, and might very easily have borrowed a fifty on the strength of it, for of course he could not dream of accepting a fee from his cousin for such a service.

Lording looked serious for a moment, but whatever fancy assailed him he dismissed it.

"Your uncle is in town," he said, "and has gone to see Tom. Perhaps we had better walk up and help to smooth things."

Mark acceded, and the two drove to Montague Gardens together. There they found father and son at decided loggerheads, the elder in a cold rage, and the younger in a hot one.

"I have never given you the right to doubt my word," Tom was saying loudly as they entered, "I never told you

a lie in my life, and I claim your credence for my version of the story as a right."

"And I demand that if your tale be true, sir," his father answered him, "you prosecute those low fellows for perjury, and clear your name of the stain which rests upon it." The old man was naturally indignant. There is pretty generally some right on both sides in a real quarrel between people who have cared for each other. "It is an insult personal to myself," said Mr. Carroll, swelling himself anew now that he had an audience, "that such an imputation should rest upon my son." Tom was very near yielding. After all, was Miss Moore's privacy in a matter like this to be set against his father's peace of mind? He had not thought about this side of the question until now, and it moved him a good deal. But Mr. Carroll could not let well alone, and unfortunately he went on: "Whom am I to believe, the six or seven sworn witnesses in the case who appeared, sir, in the light of day, or the person who was incriminated by their evidence, and who declines to take steps for the clearance of his character? Declines," said Mr. Carroll, with a white face turned toward his only son, "on a pretense so flimsy and absurd that I can but look upon it as a subterfuge."

"Am I to understand," asked Tom, with a rather wicked-sounding expression in his voice, "that you refuse to accept my word upon this matter?"

"Unless you substantiate it, certainly," said Mr. Carroll, loftily. "The story as you relate it is sufficiently dishonoring to me, but until you establish it I must prefer to believe the other and the worse."

"That is very unfortunate for both of us," said Tom, quietly. After that wild horses would not have drawn him to an exculpation of himself.

"Tom," cried Lording, "you mustn't leave your father in this way. Carroll, be reasonable."

The youngster had gathered up hat and stick and gloves, and was making for the door.

"My dear uncle," cried Mark, "forgive me if I suggest that you are both a little heated at this moment. I am sure Tom's story is the true one."

If Tom and his father quarreled, half Mark's income stood in peril.

"What do you know about the matter, Mark?" inquired Mr. Carroll.

"I have Tom's word," said Mark. His uncle turned away with a mere wave of the hand, and as he turned he faced Tom, who felt his father's gesture almost unbearably insulting.

"My father can not accept my word," he said, controlling himself to outer quiet. "That is very unhappy for us both, but my fault by no means."

"You sha'n't go," cried Lording with an oath, stepping in between Tom and the door.

"I will go," said Mr. Carroll, taking up his hat. "Nephew Mark, may I ask that you will give me your arm? Shall I see you before you leave town, Lording? Good-day, sir," turning to his son, "and good-bye."

"You sha'n't go, either," cried Lording again, setting his back against the door.

"Sir!" said Mr. Carroll, with pompous passion, "stand aside. I can manage my family affairs without extraneous assistance. I disown that fellow. He is no son of mine any longer. I repudiate all claims he may make upon me."

"Go your way," said Lording, puffing and blowing with rage at the other's tone toward him. "You pompous idiot, go your way. But mark my words, you'll be sorry for this to the day of your death."

Mr. Carroll, with his white face suddenly grown scarlet, stood waiting for Mark's arm. Mark, with an apologetic glance at Tom and Lording, offered it, and the two marched out of the room and down the stairs together. The two who were left behind stood agaze at each other, listening to the creak of Carroll's footsteps on the stairs, to the jar of bolt and chain as the door opened and the crash with which it closed behind him.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONCE in the street, Mr. Carroll began to compose himself, and in a few minutes withdrew his arm from Mark's, and walked along without assistance. Mark looked at him now and then, when he thought his glance likely to be observed, with an air of respectful commiseration,

"I am not familiar with this part of London," said Mr. Carroll, in a little while, "and I wish to rest for a time before I return."

"You would like to drive to an hotel, sir?" asked Mark. "Shall I call a hansom?"

Mr. Carroll signifying assent, Mark called a hansom, and they were driven together to a highly respectable but old-fashioned hotel, where the elder commanded a private room. His nephew accompanied him, preserving a respectful silence. Mark's clever brains were swimming with ideas. How was all this going to turn out? Barring himself and Tom, the head of the family had scarcely kith or kin, and if the breach between father and son were to be lasting, it was almost certain to prove a magnificent thing for him.

"He's as pig-headed and obstinate as he knows how to be," thought Mark, as he stood near the object of his reflections with an almost deferential air, "but I think *I* know how to manage him."

"You have not yet taken luncheon, Mark?" asked Mr. Carroll. It was his study always to be as little disturbed as possible, and though the interview with his son had greatly shaken him, he was not going to show more than he could help. His only child had disgraced himself beyond recovery, and he had cast him off and was prepared to play the Spartan over him.

Mark, on the other hand, was disposed to think that a little mental disturbance would seem becoming in himself under the circumstances. If it were only from sympathy with his uncle his appetite must needs be a little feeble.

"I don't care for luncheon, sir," said Mark.

"Pray order for two," returned Mr. Carroll, and Mark obeyed him. "A little soup and a bird, or something of that kind, Mark," said the elder, as the waiter entered the room. "I leave it to you. Show me to a bedroom, waiter, in the first instance, and call me when luncheon is ready."

The waiter obeyed, and returned to Mark to receive instructions. The young man, having dispatched him, walked up and down the room, and pausing before the mirror, smiled at his own reflection there. As yet nothing had happened which might not be smoothed over, but yet he thought it extremely unlikely that it should be.

"There is no other such pig-headed fool in Europe as

my uncle,'' said Mark, pleasantly, to himself. "He's an absolute revelation of the possibilities of human egotism. The common curse of mankind is his in great revenue. I don't think he ever had a worshiper at the Trench House shrine so far, and I fancy, I *fancy* that he'd like one. Infidels bow the knee at times,'' he went on, with a chuckle, "and atheist as I am, I can seem to worship Thomas Carroll. Tom never had the knack of it, and yet he believed in the elder donkey.''

This clever young man saw rose-colored prospects in the near distance. To do him justice he would have tried to oust Tom years ago if it had occurred to him that there had been any reasonable chance of success and no reasonable chance of detection. He was a young man in whom one sentiment ruled, and one only—a keen desire that Mark Carroll should be in all realizable ways prosperous and happy. Had he moved in savage circles of the lower order he would have found his life-philosophy pretty universally accepted, and as a necessity would have had to fight for it. As it was he was perfectly aware that there were people who affected to believe that such a philosophy was shameful. He knew well enough that these people had disciples so foolish as really to believe in a creed of unselfishness. He had eyes and ears; he read books and walked about in the world; he was cleverer than nineteen men out of any twenty he encountered, and he knew it; and he believed with his whole soul that Folly's most prodigious birth might be found in the sermon on the Mount. In deference to King Humbug, the world's one genuine potentate, he kept these sentiments to himself. Other people pretend to think them shameful, and Mark was ready to pretend in all cases where pretense was useful.

"Nephew Mark,'' said Mr. Carroll, when the almost untasted meal had been cleared away, "I have something of importance to say to you. I do not speak in the heat of temper, but after full and complete deliberation. You know what disappointment I have suffered at your cousin's hands, and you have seen that I could vindicate the position in which it has pleased Providence to place me. It is necessary for once to allude to that topic. I beg that it may never again be spoken of in my presence.'' Mark bowed in reverent, sympathetic silence. "At my decease the estate and the position it carries with it naturally de-

scend to you." He was looking at Mark as he said this, and the young man was looking at him. It was Mark's triumph when that difficult interview was ended that not even his eyes had shown at this juncture a sign of joy. "I do not claim," Mr. Carroll went on, "that your conduct should be regulated by any standard of mine, but I have it in my power to do again what I have done to-day. I am the custodian of the family honor, and I will be faithful to my trust. That is all I need say. I demand nothing more of you than the preservation of that honor—unbroken and unsoiled."

Now, much as Mark had expected from the quarrel between Tom and his father, he had not counted on having it placed in his hands so soon, and his uncle's speech was something of a shock to him. But, in deference to the laws promulgated by King Humbug, he felt that some sort of unavailing protest in his cousin's interest was necessary and befitting.

"You ask me, sir," he began therefore, "to act in all things as becomes a gentleman?" Mr. Carroll inclined his head.

"That is all I ask of you," he answered.

"You offer me a position and a fortune to which I could never have dared to aspire." Mr. Carroll inclined his head again. "If I risk the loss of your favor at the first moment of its bestowal you may be sure that the motives which animate me are strong indeed. If I ask you to reconsider your determination—"

"You ask an impossibility," returned his uncle. "Let me hear no more of this. Your interference in this matter will result in consequences unpleasant to us both. I am not blind to the creditable nature of your motives, Mark, but I can not tolerate interference in this matter."

Mark bowed in silence and looked as disappointed as he could. He had done what the Absurdities demanded of him, and had pretended to be ready to sacrifice his own interests for another man's benefit. As if anybody but a fool had ever really wanted to do that! The two egotists sat in silence for a time, each filled with himself. The elder was naturally a good deal incensed at Tom, and it was evident that Tom was altogether in the wrong, and that his father was absolutely blameless in the whole affair. Mr. Carroll had always been blameless. That was one of his

characteristics. In his most dispassionate survey of his own career he could not find a single peg on which to hang one thought of self-reproach. He had never been at fault in judgment, never at fault in conduct. It seemed outside the pale of possibility that he could be so. As an inevitable consequence of this majestic self-approval came sweet peace. It seemed a sort of added credit to him to have been tried in this way, and to have come out of the ordeal so magnificently. Sparta nor Rome had never held a father who could have behaved better under the circumstances and have cut off his own flesh with a more tranquil calm. The world would know it—his world—and would approve his action, as it had always done and been compelled to do by the very nature of things.

"When you can feel yourself at liberty, Mark," said Mr. Carroll, after this pause, "I shall be glad to see you at Trench House. I do not purpose to myself to appropriate your time and attention, but it will be fitting that you should be seen there occasionally, and that by a gradual adoption of county duties you should prepare yourself for your future position."

"The old ass talks as if I were going to be an emperor," said Mark to himself. A man with a sense of humor was likely enough to find in Mr. Carroll a continual feast.

"I can not attempt to disguise from you, sir," said Mark, respectfully, "that my professional occupations are of the most shadowy nature. I go the ordinary rounds, but I have nothing to do, and never have had. I find it too hard to stoop, as many of my competitors in the race do daily, to fish for intimacy with solicitors."

Mr. Carroll approved of this sentiment highly as Mark knew he would.

"You will find your legal training of great value on the bench," he answered; "otherwise you may count yourself independent of it. There is nothing ungentlemanly or unbecoming to your future place in society in the position of a barrister, but I should wish you to be independent of your profession, and shall make you such an allowance as will be worthy of my own wealth and status."

What with his sense of humor, and his triumph at the turn his affairs had taken, Mark could have laughed aloud, but he repressed himself. He only thanked his uncle with becoming gravity and humility.

"It shall be my study, sir," he said, "to be worthy of the confidence you repose in me." The elder accepted this promise and the thanks which preceded it by an inclination of the head.

"I had not known," he said by and by, "that I might spend a night in town, and my portmanteau lies at the cloak-room at the Euston Station. I shall be obliged if you will accompany me and see it into the van, properly labeled."

"With pleasure," answered Mark. "So I am to be a sort of upper flunky or body-servant, am I?" he said to himself. "Well, the wages are worth it, and I can't expect to get everything for nothing."

When the time came he accompanied the head of the house to the railway-station, and saw him comfortably disposed. Mark's manner had never been so suave and amiable and respectful. Mr. Carroll did not actually think about it, but he felt that he was being treated in a proper way, and that his nephew was a young man of sense and feeling.

"I shall be glad to see you at Trench House in a week's time, Mark," said the elder, when they were about to part. "Can you make it convenient to be there this day week?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Mark.

"Make arrangements to stay for a week if that be possible," said Mr. Carroll.

The train started, and Mark paced along the platform into the street, smiling, with his eyes upon the ground. What a stroke of fortune!

"How little we can guess what is going to happen!" he thought exultingly. "Why should not Providence take care of me as well as of other men? I never looked for it. I thought I was going to be a poor devil all my life, and the truth is the better by comparison. There's little danger of that sour old numskull turning round in favor of Tom. There is nothing so obstinate, so unreasonable, and so fixed in its own belief in its own wisdom as a fool; possibly because there is a lurking notion underneath that he really is a fool, or would confess that he once had been if he changed his mind. Oh, my prophetic soul, mine uncle! how happy we shall be together! How I shall tickle your foibles and how you will tickle mine to be sure! Yours

being to be flattered as a monument of wisdom, and mine to walk in Poole's attire and siller hae to spare."

He walked home to his chambers in high spirits, and surrendered himself to his day-dreams. Day-dreams were not much in Mark's line as a rule, but for once he felt that he had a right to them. He had scarcely sat there for half an hour when he heard a step upon the stair, and by and by a knock at the door. By force of habit he reconnoitered in his usual way, but even as he did so he thought with a splendid flush of triumph that all need for that sort of discomfort would soon be over. His visitor was no other than Lording, and Mark admitted him with a sort of grieved alacrity.

"This is a miserable business, Mark," said the old boy, "a miserable business."

"It is, indeed," said Mark. With Lording, Mark's concern had a sort of petulance and impatience in it, and his manner was most artistically differentiated from that he had worn in Mr. Carroll's presence. "Tom's a splendid fellow, one of the finest fellows in the world, and my uncle is the best man I *ever* knew, but they're father and son, and they've one characteristic in common. There's no shaking either of them. I've been talking to my uncle, but he won't listen. Now, I'll be absolutely candid with you, Mr. Lording, because I know I can trust you. You were a friend of my father's, and you're a friend of my uncle's and a friend of Tom's. My uncle has told me this afternoon that he means absolutely to disinherit Tom and to set me in his place. I'm as poor as a rat—my profession never brought me a farthing—and I'm naturally as willing as most men to be well-to-do, but I can't tolerate a proceeding so unnatural. For Heaven's sake, don't tell my uncle that I told you this. I know he offended you shamefully this morning, but you'll forget that for Tom's sake, won't you?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Lording. "You're a good lad, Mark. There is no reason why your uncle shouldn't do something handsome for you, the estate'll stand it; but it's absurd to talk of disinheriting Tom. The lad has done nothing to deserve it, and it's really too absurd."

"Of course it is," said Mark, with petulant heartiness. "But if the breach isn't healed somehow my uncle will do it. Tom acted very stupidly this morning."

"The old man was more at fault than he was," cried Lording, who was a stanch partisan. "Tom was quixotic and no worse, and by gad!" the old boy broke out, "that's a fault on the right side in a lad's character. I shall give your uncle a piece of my mind, Mark. I don't care a hang about what he said to me this morning. Old friendships between reasonable people are not broken in a minute. It's a poor, bladdery sort of liking that can be pricked into nothing by a hasty word, eh, Mark?"

"If my uncle once makes this arrangement in my favor," said Mark, "he'll be immovable. Anything that is to be done must be done at once."

"Certainly, certainly," said Lording again. "You are acting very handsomely, Mark, and your conduct ought to be worth a thousand or two to you when Tom comes to his own. Though I know very well that that doesn't weigh with you. But money's a useful thing, Mark, a very useful thing."

"So people tell me," said Mark, with a laugh.

"Any immediate pressure, Mark?" asked Lording. "A hundred any good to you for a month or two, or a year or two, eh?" Mark laughed again, and threw up the palms of his hands.

"I mustn't borrow," he answered genially. "A man who has no prospect of paying may just as well steal as borrow."

"You may be Lord Chancellor one of these days," said Lording. "And between friends, Mark—between friends."

Mark allowed the old boy to pull out his check-book.

"You are forewarned, Mr. Lording," he said, with another laugh. "If you insist on lending you can't expect a man so poor as I am to say 'No' to you."

"There you are, Mark," said Lording, in quite a comfortable glow of friendship. "I shall get down by the next train, and see your uncle in the morning and we'll get through this confounded business somehow. And look here, Mark, you've acted well in this affair. Honor is honor, and all that, I know, but human nature's human nature too, and it isn't every man who would do his best to throw over such a fortune."

"Don't tell my uncle you know anything from me," said Mark. "I can't afford to anger him. And don't lose any time."

"No, no," said Lording. "I'll keep dark about you, Mark, and I'll be at him in the morning."

"There's another blunder-headed old idiot," said Mark to himself, as he watched Lording's figure down the stairs. "Go at him in the morning by all means, whilst his wrath is nice and hot. The proud fool hasn't forgotten the peppery fool's speech of this morning. Lord, it's a world of fools, and I am the only sensible man seen this last fortnight. Come along," said Mark, apostrophizing the check and waving it gayly in the air. "I shall have time to cash you before the bank closes, but not a minute more."

The young man was as usual in low water, and had scarce seen his way to the visit to Trench House, without this unexpected generous loan. A much prouder man than Mark might have accepted the loan from Lording without offense to his own pride. He was not a happy young fellow as a rule, but with a hundred pounds in his pocket and a fortune in the near distance, he knew how to be light-hearted for an evening. He sat down that evening to an admirable dinner, and drank a bottle of rare old Burgundy. Then he dropped in at one of the theaters, and being blessed with a good digestion, was ready for an oyster supper after the performance, and that being over he went comfortably home and slept.

Lording, full of the most benevolent intentions, called at Trench House next morning, and bustled heartily into Mr. Carroll's library, with his right hand outstretched in greeting. Mr. Carroll took it frigidly enough and waved his visitor to a seat.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of your visit, Mr. Lording?" he asked, icily.

"Come, come, Carroll," said the other, "don't let a hasty word sever a thirty years' friendship between neighbors. I spoke hastily yesterday, and if I spoke offensively I'm very sorry for it."

"Pray let no more be said," answered the other.

"That's right," said Lording. "And now, look here, Carroll, what about this affair of Tom's?" Mr. Carroll raised his eyebrows, and looked a frozen inquiry at his guest. "What can an old friend do to mediate between you?"

"You were present at our interview yesterday," said Mr. Carroll, loftily, "and you were a witness to the man-

ner of our parting. No mediation is necessary between us. We have done with each other."

"Good Heavens, Carroll, you can't mean it!" cried Lording. "It's barbarous—barbarous—absolutely barbarous. What in the name of wonder has the lad done? I had the story from his cousin Mark, and there was nothing unbecoming of a gentleman in it from first to last—a bit quixotic perhaps, a little ridiculously tender about the girl's reputation, but hang it all, Carroll—"

Mr. Carroll's arctic solemnity froze the good old fellow into silence.

"If there is any other topic in the world," said this Roman father, "upon which you choose to speak to me, I shall be glad to listen to you." Curious, he thought, how meddlesome people were.

"You mean to throw Tom over?" asked Lording, in anger and amazement.

"Mr. Lording," answered the Roman father, "I do not care to talk upon this theme."

"But I do," shouted Lording, in his big, hearty voice. "And what's more, I have a right to talk about it. The lad's engaged to be married to my daughter, and I'm not going to have any undeserved stigma cast on him if I can help it. Don't stare at me as if I were a seven-legged horse or a spotted lady. Damn your airs, sir! I stand on my rights."

"Sir," said Mr. Carroll, more frozen than ever, if that were possible, "I can foresee no beneficial result from this interview. You are already fully informed with respect to my intentions, and I must beg you to regard them as being fixed and final."

"You mean to throw Tom over?" asked Lording again.

"I have already expressed my meaning fully and completely," returned the other.

Lording broke out with a great curse.

"You heartless blackguard! I'll post you! Mark my words, I'll post you from one end of the county to the other. And, by gad, sir! if you throw the lad over, I take him in hand. I've got enough for the pair of 'em, and they shall marry as soon as they like, and live down here and be an eyesore to you."

Mr. Carroll rang the bell with no change in the iciness

of his demeanor. Lording, in his rage, turned upon the man who answered the summons.

"I'll begin here," he cried, with an apoplectic face. He seized the man by the shoulders. "Do you see that fellow there? Here's the greatest scoundrel unhung. Do you guess what he's done? Sent off his only son into the world because he behaved like a gentleman. I'll stop the very laborers in the fields and tell 'em of it."

"The door!" thundered the master of the house, all his icy contempt giving way to sudden anger.

"I'll go when I like and how I like," cried Lording, shaking his riding-whip in Carroll's face. He had never been a great stickler for dignity, and by this time he had very little left.

"The door!" cried Mr. Carroll, again tugging madly at the bell-pull until it came down in his hands. Three or four servants, male and female, ran in alarm to answer this remarkable summons, and stood huddled at the door of the room.

"You barbarous scoundrel!" shouted Lording, who could scarcely speak for rage. "I'll post you everywhere, and I'll fight the lad's cause against you whilst I've a breath in my body. There's a villain for you!" he stammered at the amazed and frightened servants. "Turns his only son out of house and home for nothing!"

"Remove this madman!" said Mr. Carroll, with some return to calmness. "Do you hear?"

At this the enraged old man made at him with his riding-whip, but the butler, who was a lusty fellow with no want of courage, stepped between.

"Can't stand by and see that, sir," he said quietly. Then the others took courage and flocked into the room. The butler led the contingent, with remonstrances and prayers to Lording, and, advancing slowly, backed him out of the house, he still raging and threatening and cursing. He was mounted and more than half way home before he recovered himself. All on a sudden he groaned and pulled his horse up smartly.

"Well!" he cried, disconsolately. "I'm a pretty sort of old fool to undertake to mediate for a poor lad. The fat's in the fire now beyond a doubt."

It did not indeed seem likely that his interview with Tom's father had greatly advanced Tom's cause. The

story reached Mark's ears through the butler, who was not indisposed to be on friendly terms with the new heir, though he regretted the fate of the old one. The new heir listened to it all with a serious and even an aggrieved expression.

"Poor old fellow," he said. "He loved Tom dearly. He meant well, Daniels, but it was not the right way to take."

He went away sorrowful, to look at, but when he reached the solitude of his own room he laughed until his sides ached and the tears were in his eyes.

"A world of fools!" said Mark. "A world of fools!"

CHAPTER XIV.

It was plain to Mary Lording that her father was disturbed, but he would confess nothing as yet, in spite of all her coaxing. Something within herself held her back from the plain question she wished to ask, and she avoided the mention of Tom's name. Baretti was far away, and she never heard of him except through her affianced lover's letters. What with novels and plays, one gets a little tired of this eternal theme of love, and the powers of the passion are so much insisted on that one grows into a sort of tacit unbelief in them. Yet the stories of its prowess are true after all, and it makes a full half of the real joys of the world and a full half of the world's real sorrow. It was not agreeable to the girl to confess to herself that the scattered mentions of Baretti in Tom Carroll's letters made them welcome to her, and that she read and reread the letters for the sake of them. She meant to be honest all along, and she did battle with her own interest in the painter, and despised and hated herself twenty times a day because the interest mastered her. But she was going to marry Tom Carroll, and to be a true and loyal wife to him. To a purely loved girl loyalty meant loyalty in thought simply, because active disloyalty, if her own mind had hinted at it—as it never could untempted—would have looked most monstrously impossible.

She was not happy as she once had been, but she looked for happiness after her marriage, and was disposed to dive into matrimony headlong, because it looked as if it were

the only state in which she could forget her unfortunate interest in Baretti.

"I have had a stupid quarrel with a stupid friend of mine, my dear," said her father at last, in answer to her coaxing, "and I am stupid enough to be annoyed by it. That's all, my darling. Run away and leave a disagreeable old man to himself." She kissed him obediently and went away, and he noticed, not for the first time, that she was scarcely as sprightly as she had used to be. "Leaving girlhood behind her, and growing into a woman, poor thing," said the father, glancing after her. "All young things frisk about jollily, and all old ones grow slow and sadden down a bit."

That was a very unusual sort of reflection for Lording, but recent circumstances had somewhat depressed him. His daughter passed from his thoughts after a little time, and he concentrated himself on Tom and that unfortunate youngster's affairs. It was clear enough now that the elder Carroll had meant what he had said to Tom in London, but it was on Lording's conscience that he himself might have been partially responsible for the father's bitter conclusion.

"If I had left him alone," he thought at times, "he might have repented." But then he would break out with new anathemas against his neighbor. "Not he! The bowelless scoundrel! The pompous, stuck-up heartless prig!"

Lording had many misgivings about Tom's acceptance of the offer he meant to make him. The youngster was proud, and it was a hundred to one that he would be too high-minded to live as a dependent on the bounty of his father-in-law; and yet the old fellow determined to try him. For one thing (apart from his love for his daughter, and his friendship for Tom, and his resolve to make them happy if he could), this plan was the only one he could think of which really bade fair to carry bitterness to the elder Carroll's soul.

"It's of no use to try to do a thing like this by letter," he said to himself. "I must go up to town and see the lad."

He dispatched a telegram, asking if Tom could meet him at a certain hour on the morrow, and, receiving an affirma-

tive answer, he sought his daughter and told her that business called him back to London for a day.

"Take me with you, papa," said Mary. "It is dull to be left behind in this way."

"I needn't start until to-morrow," responded Lording, though he itched to go at once, "and you can send over for one or two of the Harold girls. They'll keep you company."

"You are worrying about something," she said, "and I want to be with you."

"My darling," her father answered, "you will be more dull and unhappy in a London hotel than you would be at home, and I can't take you about with me. I'm not in any sort of trouble or distress. I am only angry with a man I used to think well of, and he has turned out to have a bad heart, my dear. And now I won't tell you any more about it until it's all smoothed out again as well as it ever can be."

It was almost the first time in his life that he had denied her anything, and it was easily to be seen that he was resolved, and was not to be shaken. She elected to remain alone whilst he went to London, and stayed behind in some anxiety. Tom was in waiting when Lording drove up to Number Twenty, Montague Gardens.

"Have you heard from your father, Tom?" asked Lording, after a hasty greeting.

"I had a letter this morning," said Tom, "and I am glad you are here." The youngster was much disturbed, and spoke with a faltering voice, which not all his resolution could keep steady. "My father tells me," he went on, "that he has given instructions for the making of a new will, which shall set my cousin Mark in my place. If I thought I had done anything to deserve this—"

Lording got up and shook hands with him. "Nothing in the world, lad," he answered heartily. "Nothing in the world."

"I can't think I have," said the youngster, sadly. "But there it is, sir, and I know my father well. It is no more likely that he will change than it is that I should ask him to do so. And, of course, that's impossible."

"Quite, quite, quite," cried Lording. "But now, Tom, how about Mary? We're not going to have any ridiculous, nonsensical scruples at her expense, are we?"

"I don't understand you, sir," answered Tom.

"Well, now, look here," said the old boy, taking Tom's hand anew, and speaking with bluff sincerity of voice and manner. "Mary's a downright good, honest girl, though I say so. I know her well enough to be sure of one thing, and that is, that she'd never say 'Yes' to a man she didn't care for. Now your father can do what he likes with his money, but he can't do what he likes with my little girl. She's got enough for both, Tom, and I wouldn't have any little fancy of hers balked in this way, let alone a thing like this. Now, you will get married at once like a sensible lad, won't you? And we'll just contrive to rub along without the Trench House estate as well as we can; eh, Tom?"

"You are very good, sir," said Tom, looking away from Lording to hide his eyes, which were moist at the other's generosity and friendship. "But—"

"But me no buts," cried Lording. "Act like a sensible, generous lad, who sets money at its true value."

"No, sir," said Tom, firmly and miserably. "I can't be a pauper even on *your* bounty. It's very good. It's like you. But I can't do it."

"Now, come," said Lording, in pretended anger. "You're not going to throw my girl over, are you?"

"If Mary will wait for me a little time," Tom answered, "I will try to do something to make a place in the world which will be worth her taking. But it's unfair to ask it, and she must take back her freedom."

"I thought better of you, Tom," said the elder, "than to throw your sweetheart over like that."

"Don't make it too hard for me, sir," Tom besought him. It was hard to lose his love, but it seemed as hard to say how hard it was. His own delicacy and the very fervor of his passion held him from proclaiming it. "The best thing Miss Lording can do, sir, will be to forget me. I hope she will be able to do it easily." His loyal heart did strive after that bitter hope, though vainly.

"Now, do you mean to tell me," said Lording, drawing his most pointed arrow to the head and letting it fly—"do you mean to tell me that if Mary had lost her last penny you'd have thrown her over? What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, Tom, and you'll have to come to reason. Why, man alive, if you like to work, there's no

reason why you shouldn't become a distinguished man and have us all proud of you."

"Well, sir," answered Tom with an unsuccessful smile, "let me try. If I can bring anything I shall be contented."

"Very well," cried the other, thinking he saw his bent, "fame's as good as money, and a great deal better. Work, lad, work! You've got it in you—fetch it out. Take a year, and stick to it. I'll lay my head to a brass farthing you make a mark in that time. Come, that's a bargain."

"I have thought it all over, sir," said Tom, "and I know how I ought to act. To begin with, I can't have any pretensions to a claim upon Miss Lording. I can't ask her to wait for me or to expect anything from me. I must give her back her freedom, and it must be complete and uncontrolled, and not in any way a pretense. But if, in spite of that, I should be able in a year or two to come back and say to you, 'I am getting on a little in the world, and am in the way to earn a little money and to make something of a name,' I might take my chance again with her like any other man. I'm not heart-broken, sir, and I'm not going to be. If she cares for me as I do for her, she'll wait for me, and we shall be married in the end; because no man's scruples could justify him in spoiling a woman's life. If she doesn't, she will have her liberty, and will recognize the change in my position, and will learn to care for somebody else."

"Have you got the right to put a woman in that position, Tom?" asked Lording—"to make her claim you?"

"If I ever feel that I have done anything, I can make my appeal to you," Tom answered. "I've told you everything, sir. I've told you of some poor hopes of mine which ten to one will come to nothing, but they must influence nobody except myself. I'm obliged to hold them, for I don't think I could do without them." Throughout this interview the younger man's voice had been kept with evident difficulty at a dead level of monotony, but there it broke so eloquently that Lording's eyes tingled with tears. He winked both eyes together and blew his nose with violence.

"Answer me one question, Tom," he said, a second or two later. "This isn't a time for choosing phrases and that sort of thing, and so I'll put it plain and straight. Do

you love my daughter?" Now that is not an easy thing for some sorts of men to talk about, and Tom Carroll was peculiarly sensitive. But he answered, though with difficulty—

"I don't think that any man ever loved a woman more dearly."

"Very well. Do you think— One more question— Do you think that she loves you?" That was a matter still harder to talk about, but he answered again—

"I believe so."

"Then I'll have no melodramatic nonsense imported into *my* domestic affairs," cried Lording, "and the match will go on just the same as ever."

"Does Miss Lording know the news?" Tom asked. He had not dared to put the question until now.

"No," said the old boy. "I kept it from her until the tangle should be straightened." If Lording had come as her emissary, there would have been a temptation in it, though even then he was resolved that there was nothing for it but to give her back her freedom whilst he dared the world.

"Let me write to her," said Tom. "It is the only way. I will give her back her freedom—"

"And if she refuses it?" asked Lording.

"I will beg her to wait a year. Oh!" he cried out suddenly, "don't you see how hard it is for me to do my duty?"

"Tom," said the senior, "you're a good deal of a Quixote and a bit of an ass, and altogether a right down good fellow. I shall stick to you, and my little girl will stick to you, and this affair will stir you up and make you work, and we shall all be happy and comfortable together. And when I'm gone you'll be well enough off for any reasonable creature. But confound the money! I *did* think you had a soul above that sort of thing, and I'm a bit disappointed in you. Why, in the name of all that's reasonable, couldn't you get married and go on working? There, there. Never mind. You're a fine-natured, honorable lad, Tom—a bit of an ass, but a fine lad, and I'm as pleased with you as if you were a prince and had a million. I'm not a fool," cried the old boy, "except in places, and I don't pretend to think meanly about money; but I think more of my little girl than I do of all the money in the world. You're the man she chose, and I suppose she

wants you, or she wouldn't have said 'Yes' to you; and by gad, sir, what my little girl wants she has as a general thing, and that you'll find out when you're married."

But it was hard work to swim against the tide. Tom was not to be moved just then by any sally of mirth, real or pretended, and Lording's jollity for once had hardly the look of the real thing, or the tone of it.

"I must write to her," said Tom. "You will take my letter?" There was a comfortless feel about the thought of its delivery by the post.

"Certainly," said Lording. "But before you write it, think of what you owe to Mary as well as of what you owe to yourself. Don't let any overgrown sense of honor make you cruel or selfish, Tom."

That was rather an out-of-the way bit of analysis for Lording, but he was not the first man in whom heart has stood instead of brains. Tom wrote his letter, and the old fellow went away the while and spent a weary hour or two in wandering about the streets. His mission had failed in its main purpose, though it had not been totally unproductive of result. The youngster, as he wrote, was not hopeless. He was himself of so loyal and honest a nature that it came natural to believe that after all that had happened Mary would hold to him and be true. He had never been worthy of her, and never could be; but he would do something in a year—the opera was near its completion—to achieve fame and to look less unworthy than he had always seemed. His letter was not a long one, but it took a long time to write, and when Lording came back again it was but just finished. Half a quire of blotted and crumpled sheets lay in the waste-paper basket at his side, and the lover emptied them into the fire almost as his sweetheart's father entered.

"And now, Tom," said Lording, when he had taken the letter, and put it away in his pocket-book, "how about immediate resources? What are you going to do? You *must* let me help you there."

"I don't need it," said Tom. "The money my mother left me brings in nearly two hundred and fifty a year. I can live on that, and I will, until I can manage to do something to increase it."

"Very well," said Lording. "It's little enough, but you can do with it, no doubt. And what are your plans?"

"Well," said Tom, blushing fierily, "there's an opera nearly finished, and I do really believe there's something in it, and that it can be placed. Hoffmann has looked at it, and thinks very well of it."

He got out the score and began to turn it over on the table, and Lording looked at it reverentially. Whatever pertained to executive art was wonderful to Lording, and Tom, encouraged by his simple admiration, went to the piano and played the opening chorus. When Tom Carroll played anything that moved him, his face would grow pale and its expression on a sudden curiously mobile and changeful, his breathing would become a little hard, and there was a score of other signs of artistic emotion under artistic control about him. It was rather the observation of these signs and the abandonment and vigor with which the composer played than the music itself which touched the hearer, but he thought he had never heard anything so splendid, and he said so.

"What an idiot the lad's father is, to be sure!" he said to himself, as he sat and watched rather than listened. "All his own stuff, by gad; and what splendid stuff it is too!" He could but think how proud he would have been had Fate given him such a son, and he sat and admired him until he felt all fatherly. And Tom played himself into enthusiasm too, for it is so easy to believe in one's own work in the days of youth and hope and self-conceit. A middle-aged man who is greatly enamored of his own work is perhaps not likely to be good for much, but a lad who is not at times in love with the product of his own brains is certain to be good for nothing. Tom played the finale of the first act, and heard in it a hundred things the listener could not know—the soaring soprano and the high warbling tenor, and the wail of fiddles, and the long-drawn, snoring groan of the 'cellos, and the bird-like tones of the flutes—and the white, sinewy hands grasped the keys with greater and greater exigence of power, until the chamber rang with the rich thunder, and Tom, as he struck the final chord, turned on Lording with such a face of triumph and passion that the old fellow leaped to his feet, clapped his hands, and shouted "Bravo!" with all his heart.

If a lad like that couldn't get on, what was the good of the world at all?

This interlude did the composer a prodigious deal of good also, in so much that he began to feel almost grateful to his father for having been thus unjustly angry with him, and having thrown him thus to struggle with the world. He would make even that hard and cruel father proud of him and glad to recall his false estimate of him. When he and Lording had parted, he went back to his work, and played the opera through from start to finish as a whet to the artistic appetite. And what a performance he enjoyed, to be sure! Airy tongues syllabled the libretto, and the orchestra of fancy was perfect at a single rehearsal. An hour after midnight he went to bed too tired to sleep, and fancy made him a free gift of all he had lost, and multiplied it tenfold with fame and domestic bliss.

But, before she went to bed, Mary's father had carried his letter to her, and had told her all the story. She was awakened already to the fact that there was in the world a stronger love than she had thought strong enough to marry on, but if ever it could have been possible to find a time when she would have been willing to leave her lover, it would certainly not be when he was in trouble and distress and had most need of all that was left to him. The lovers had been close enough together by this time for the girl to learn that the young man loved her with all his heart, and that she was more than anything and everything else in the world to him. She was not the less pledged to Tom because he was in trouble. Rather, if anything, she was the more bound to him. To that effect she wrote, expressing herself all the more warmly because she found it necessary to contradict the longings which went out after freedom. Her letter made Tom perfectly happy, and kept him at work until the opera was finished, and inspired him so that his music caught a touch of love's brightness.

A few days later Mark took up what turned out to be a permanent residence, at Trench House. The Lordings and he saw but little of each other, for Mr. Carroll was so mightily incensed that he never forgave his neighbor to the day of his death, and resigned his Commission of the Peace rather than meet him. But now and again they met, and Mary, who had at first been inclined to dislike Mark because he had profited by Tom's misfortune, learned to think better of him. The end of the hunting season was approaching, and Mary and her father rode to the meet

and there encountered Mark. Lording shook hands with him cordially, but the girl greeted him with the chilliest little bow in the world. But the new heir to the Trench House estate had good reasons for standing well with his neighbors, and, not being easily abashed, he refrained from following the hounds that day, and attached himself to Miss Lording, in spite of the broad hints her manner gave him to begone.

"May I speak a word to you, Miss Lording?" said Mark, as they rode homeward together, and Lording jogged on behind in company with a fellow magistrate encountered on the road. Her manner gave him no encouragement, but he took her cold silence for consent, and spoke his word. "In your own mind, Miss Lording," he began, "you are doing me a very serious wrong."

"Indeed?" she answered curtly.

"You are, indeed," said Mark. "You do me the wrong to believe that I took the place I hold with the intent to keep it permanently. You think me scoundrel enough to accept this position at my cousin's expense." She looked at him strangely—incredulously, Mark thought. "You will see by and by that I am here as my cousin's friend," he went on, "and that I only serve the place of what in Parliament is called a warming-pan. You distrust me; you do me the injustice to believe that I would accept the position that my uncle offers me; and as a consequence you dislike me. I don't like to be disliked by the Queen of the County, and I don't like to be misjudged. It's a very agreeable little holiday for a poor man like me, if it weren't for Tom's discomfort in the meantime, but he knows from me that I am doing all I can to straighten matters, and that I shall resign in his favor as soon as I have brought my uncle round."

There was an air of jolly candor about Mark as he said all this which made the girl condone even the phrase about the Queen of the County, which (as may be admitted) was not in the very best taste. No young man can be perfect all round, and Mark's courtships, numerous as they were, had one and all been directed at ladies who liked their compliments unwatered—neat, as they say of spirits. The girl more than half believed him, and, since he could do so much for Tom if he were so minded, it was scarcely wise, in Tom's behalf, to be at daggers drawn with him.

"Confess it," said Mark. "You thought so ill of me?"

"I believed you human, Mr Carroll," she responded, with a spice of satire in her tone.

"I hope so," Mark answered. "Will you let me tell you one thing, Miss Lording? For a man bred as I was, I've been horribly poor. My profession never brought me a penny, and if it hadn't been for Tom I don't know what I should have done. Financially, I've always been a lame dog, and Tom has always been helping me over the stile at the expense of his own pocket. I remember those things, Miss Lording, and I'm not the man to do him an ill turn in answer to all the good turns he has done for me."

"Mr. Carroll," said the girl, quite vanquished, "I am very sorry to have misjudged you." She held out her hand, and Mark reached across his saddle and accepted it with the air of a courtier before a queen.

In the glow of her partisanship for Tom she felt almost certain of herself. Baretti was away, and at times she prayed that she might never see him again. And sometimes the warmth and tenderness of her feeling for Tom so carried her away that she would wonder at her interest in his friend, and the unknown and curious longing which possessed her when she thought of him. But even when it was that very warmth and tenderness for Tom which brought Baretti into her mind, she would fall into a delicious day-dream about the artist, from which she would awake with terror.

As for Mark, he had for the time at least justified his position. He took to writing little notes to Miss Lording in a cousinly, confidential way, reporting the softened feelings which seemed to be making way in Mr. Carroll's breast, and in a little while the girl began to look on him with friendly eyes, helped by her father's constant belief in him.

"Why," the old fellow would say, "he fought his hardest at the time in Tom's behalf, when he knew perfectly well what was going to happen. He begged me to come down and mediate with that pig-headed fellow, his uncle, to prevent him from disinheriting Tom. A very fine, unselfish good-hearted lad is Mark. A bit of a Quixote, like his cousin, but that's a family trait."

Mark, confident in his own astuteness, played this game

of his without fear of detection. It was a habit of his to talk aloud or half aloud when in solitude.

"'The goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities to a land not inhabited,'" said Mark, smilingly, as he walked in the grounds of Trench House one morning. He had met the Lordings an hour earlier, and they had been beautifully friendly with him. "All these nice people would be ready enough to lay their own faults on me and drive me out if—I seem pretty safely settled in the pasture now. If anybody is injured by my being here it's the girl who is going to marry Tom, and if she speaks well of me it's a high testimonial. What a nice girl she is! So charmingly unworldly! How faithfully she holds on to Tom in his poverty! And how sure she is that in a month or two he'll be as well off as ever! Tom, my boy, I'm afraid you'll have to turn out quite a bad sort of fellow. I remember, for instance, that you made a single visit to the house of one Signor Malfi—a single visit, Tom, and there was such a rumpus between husband and wife that they separated. But we can do much better than that for you with a little thinking. I'm afraid your interest in Miss Moore was equivocal, Tom—equivocal. I'm afraid—I'm afraid it's likely to turn out so; and there's scripture for it, Tom. 'The goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities to a land not inhabited.' I shall have to be desperately sorry, but I'm afraid it will be a Christian duty, therefore unavoidable. So far as my experience serves me, a Christian duty—therefore unavoidable—is generally beastly nasty for one side, and pleasantly profitable for the other."

It was characteristic of Mark that at this time he spoke of his cousin with great freedom to almost anybody who would listen to him, and that he always used the most eulogistic terms.

"My uncle will come round," he would say laughingly. "He's one of the best fellows in the world, and I can see him melting daily. Tom's a splendid fellow, and it's a pity to see such a father and son at loggerheads even for a moment. I sha'n't lose by their reconciliation; for the simple reason that I never had any claim on the property, and never could have. And if I bring them together, I have a claim on the gratitude of both of them." Mark's *bonhomie* would be irresistible whilst he talked in this fashion, and his ardor was wonderfully inviting. "It's a very

good thing for a poor dog like me, because it makes Tom my friend for life when I've smoothed over his difficulties for him. What an ill wind it is that blows good to nobody."

The general impression about Mark Carroll was that he was a good-natured, rather easy-going fellow, who was nobody's enemy—not even his own.

"When I perform my Christian duty," he would say sometimes, "what a dangerous witness I shall be."

CHAPTER XV.

THERE are many shabby streets on the Surrey side of the water, and many grades of shabbiness amongst them. Streets sunk into complete poverty and hardship, but bearing some trace of better times upon them; streets born into poverty and hardship, skimpily bred from their beginning, but fighting hard to look genteel; streets where decent window curtains and the bit of worthless coral under a glass shade in the window make just such a protest against their abject surroundings as the mended gloves, the suspiciously shiny hat, and the patched boots of the ratepayers within—a protest altogether inefficient and mournful; streets more desert than Sahara, as desolate in sunshine as the Bog of Allen in the rain; streets on which to enter is to be depressed. Cemeteries for live people with no flowers to make them bright. Miles of mean sarcophagi on end.

In one such street, the type of many, the houses are built of a dirtyish yellowish brick, and the line runs on for nearly half a mile in a staring monotony of hopeless ugliness. Frostbitten parlors lie behind the dwarfed railings of cabined areas, and the little curio of the resident stands plump in the center of the mean window; a bit of coral, a set of Indian chess-men, wounded, with the white Queen missing; a waxen apple of an unhealthy saffron tinge, with a hectic dash of rouge on each cheek; a looking-glass pond six inches wide with a dirty lily on it. Always, at the top of the glass shade, there is a dejected circle of crochet-work, which goes to prove that the owners of the frost-bitten parlors are not so harried by the cares of life but that they can find time to do something useless.

The houses in this street are so aggravatingly alike that these trophies are memorable to the wayfarer. A band of white biscuit china holding a prettily shaped cup, in which rested a bouquet of real flowers, ought to have been noticeable to any passer by. Perhaps it was that which stopped Tom Carroll's footsteps at the door.

His hand was raised toward the black-varnished knocker —gluey even in the winter time, and always indisposed to fulfill its functions—when the door was opened for him, and a bright face offered him a dry, unspoken welcome. The girl's figure—for the shy, bright face was a girl's—was tall, and lithe, and full; she was not exactly pretty, but was perhaps better than pretty; her eyes were beyond doubt beautiful (a soft, warm brown in color), and her lips had that mobile and sensitive look which almost everybody has known to make a plain face charming.

"Good morning, Miss Moore," said Tom. "I trust your father is better."

"I think he is—a little," answered the girl, holding the door at its widest, and squeezing herself against the wall of the warm passage to make room for the visitor to get by. "He is down-stairs, Mr. Carroll. It is the warmest room in the house."

Tom found his way down a break-neck flight of steps, of a width befitting a doll's mansion, and a depth altogether disproportionate. The girl followed with a lighter and more accustomed foot, and passing by him, threw open the door which led into the family vault, or front kitchen. There, in a stuffed arm-chair by the fire, sat the elder Carroll's late tenant, wizened in feature and stiff-set in expression.

"You are better, Moore?" Tom asked, bending over him.

"No," said the farmer in a wasted voice. "Nor never shall be. Better? Where's the chance of bettering a case like mine?"

"Father, dear," said Azubah, "you mustn't be despondent."

"Mustn't I?" he asked, turning his unnaturally bright eyes upon her. "Why not?"

"Come, father," said the girl, seating herself by him, and stroking a thin hand, "you are not always like this."

"No," he answered, with a contortion of the stiffened

features which would have been a smile if it could. "The best of men are not always wise. There's one cure for my disease—church-yard mold—church-yard mold!"

Tom thought this likely enough to be true, but it is not easy to sit by and acquiesce in that sort of prescription. "Come, come, Moore," said the young man, a little feebly.

"God bless my soul, sir," said the farmer, in that thin and husky voice of his, "there's a bit of sense left in the world yet, if I'm the only owner of it. I can't be cured, and I've got to be endured. There, there, Zubah, take it easy. But never ask me if I'm better again, Mister Thomas, for that sets my back up. When I'm better, bury me; it'll be all I shall be fit for."

It was so unpleasant to sit by and listen to this without being able to contradict it that Tom broke in at once with the object of his visit.

"What about this dairy, Moore? Mrs. Moore knows all about the quality of the things, and you might have a shop-woman."

The farmer, with his withered hands clasping his shrunken knees, stared at the fire for a time without answering.

"It's like you to make the offer, sir, and I won't say no to it. I haven't got the right to say no to it. You must let us pay you interest on the money till we can pay back the principal, if the thing prospers—and I don't see why it shouldn't."

"Very well," said Tom, "that's a bargain." He had promised himself this delight before his father's displeasure had fallen upon him. It took five hundred pounds from his resources, but he had not felt the pinch of impecuniosity as yet, and had no fear of it. It is the burned child that dreads the fire.

"The missis has been up to the place," said the farmer, "and Bethesda's been with her. They think that—stock and goodwill together—it's worth the money. You don't know Bethesda, Mr. Thomas? He's a little over-pious for my taste is Bethesda, but I think he means well, and he's a keenish man of business."

At this moment the sticky little black knocker on the front door came into reluctant action, and Azubah, ascending to answer the summons, returned in a moment with Mr. Bethesda behind her. Tom had not been greatly

noticing the girl whilst he and the father had been talking, but he had a general sense of her presence in the room, and that general sense had been agreeable. There are people who diffuse an atmosphere of sympathy, and thus put all in their presence at ease and make them natural. Azubah was one of these people, but when Tom looked at her as she came marching into the room, with Mr. Bethesda's large person and holy smile in her train, he found a sudden contradiction in her look. She was decidedly not sympathetic any longer, but on a sudden had become quite hard and frozen.

"My friend!" said Mr. Bethesda, advancing to the invalid and taking one thin hand between his own fat palms. "My Christian brother!"

"My Christian friend!" returned the farmer, with an unmoved face. He followed Mr. Bethesda's portly form with an observant, glittering eye. That gentleman bowed to Tom, and smiled his humble and beneficent smile at him. "This is Mr. Carroll, Bethesda," said the farmer, "the gentleman who is so good as to advance me the money for that little business." Mr. Bethesda smiled at Tom again, as if to reward him for his kindness. "This is my Christian friend Bethesda, Mr. Thomas. I was speaking of him when he knocked, and saying he was a trifle over-pious for my taste, but a keenish man of business, and I think he means well."

"Our friend is a caustic humorist," said Mr. Bethesda to Tom; "a caustic humorist is our friend."

"I was telling Mr. Carroll," said the farmer, with a waste-sounding cough or two behind his hand, "that you'd seen the place and looked it over, and that you think it'll be a good investment."

"With care and prudence, an admirable investment," returned Mr. Bethesda. "The shop is well appointed and respectably situated. There is no rival establishment in the neighborhood. *You* have seen the establishment, also, I believe, Miss Moore?" Azubah inclined her head ever so little and looked harder than before. "A thriving neighborhood," said Mr. Bethesda, "and a connection likely to increase."

"Well, Mr. Thomas," said the farmer, "you see that you have put us in a fair way to keep our feet again. I shall be a drug on the place for a time, but I can't last

forever, thank God, and when I am gone they'll do very well, I have no doubt."

"Father," cried the girl in a pained voice, "you must not talk like that."

"Well, well, my dear," said her father; "well, well."

"We do not live by bread alone," said Mr. Bethesda. "The family affections are precious." He turned to Azubah as if to ask her sympathy for this observation, but the girl purposely avoided his glance, and Mr. Bethesda's smile sat somewhat forlornly upon his features.

"Is the new place far from here?" asked Tom, more for the sake of breaking in upon the talk than for the sake of the question.

"You haven't seen it?" asked the farmer. "Take Mr. Carroll round and show it him, Azubah, if he'd like to see it. A bit of a walk will do you good. You'll give me my game of chess, Bethesda. Get the board, Azubah."

Mr. Bethesda's consent to the proposal for a game of chess was given readily enough, and he sat down to the table and arranged the men, whilst the girl ran upstairs to dress for out-of-doors.

"Who is Mr. Bethesda?" asked Tom, when he and the girl were in the street.

"He is Mr. Bethesda," she answered. Her whole manner had changed, and she was her genial, sympathetic self again. "'I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.'"

"I thought as much," said Tom. "He doesn't look a bad sort of fellow, though."

"He is a very good man, I believe," answered Azubah, "and he has been very kind to father, but—"

"Exactly!" said Tom; "a common case enough." They walked in silence for a minute.

"I have never told you, Mr. Carroll," said the girl, suddenly, "how you came to see me at that dreadful place. I can't bear that you should think I went there knowingly. It was Signora Malfi who took me there, and I don't think that even she quite knew what sort of place it was."

"Miss Moore," said Tom, "I don't think Signora Malfi is the sort of person for a young girl to know."

"Indeed!" she answered, a little coldly.

"Indeed!" said Tom, gently affirmative.

"It is not like you, Mr. Carroll," said Azubah, with the air of one who speaks more in sorrow.than in anger,

though with a little tinge of anger too—"it is not like you to speak ill of a poor woman who is deserted by her husband."

"Deserted?" asked Tom. "I knew nothing of that."

"Yes," said the girl. "She told me all the story. Her husband was jealous of an English gentleman who gave her English lessons, and he actually turned her out of doors."

This set Tom thinking, and kept him silent and inattentive whilst Azubah defended the signora. Mark, then, had been right in his belief about the lady, and she *had* been in love with him. It was well, any way, that Mark was not to blame, and that he had a good conscience in the matter, for Tom's ideal of virtue was lofty, and to most young men of the world in his era would have looked absurd. He came out of his reverie to hear Azubah talking of the signora still, and saying what a brave struggle she had made.

"She goes on singing at that place?" he asked. "The Megatherium?"

"What else can she do?" asked the girl, defensively. "She must make a living. There is no harm in singing there, though I couldn't bear to do it."

"I didn't mean to blame her," Tom answered. "She makes an honest living there, and the artistic demands of her audience are not beyond her powers."

"Don't you think she is an artist, Mr. Carroll?"

Tom laughed as he looked round at her, and shook his head.

"No," he answered, "whatever else she is, she is not an artist." Azubah looked depressed at this verdict. There was no going beyond Mr. Carroll's judgment in the matter of music. "About yourself, Miss Moore," said Tom, a moment later, "if you would study you could sing."

"I hope to be able to study now," she answered, thinking of the bettered hopes of her father's household. To think of those hopes was naturally to think of the man who had given them, and who now walked at her side. The shy, grateful upward glance she cast at him expressed much, but he missed it.

"It is worth trying," said Tom. "For its own sake in the first place, of course, and for the pleasure it enables

you to give to others. But there are solid advantages to be gained."

"I wish I had been born a boy," she said, suddenly, in answer to the ambitions these words aroused in her mind. She blushed fierily a second later at her own vehemence.

"You want to go out and fight the world?" asked Tom. After the Megatherium experience that was an easy guess.

"I should like to," she answered, blushing still. "I should like to be able to do something besides pricking my fingers with needle-work."

"It is a sort of duty to do whatever you have a power to do," said Tom. "That's rather a loosely constructed aphorism, by the way," he added, with a laugh. "I mean, of course, 'provided it be virtuous,' as the clergyman said to the antiquary's sister."

She was not so shy with him as she would have been with any other young man of his years. They had known each other ever since she could remember, and he had never made her feel the difference which existed in their social position. She had always known the difference, but it had never come home to her disagreeably. And he was not merely her old companion, but he was both an artist and a man. He knew the world, and the world of art within it, and he could sympathize with her if she laid bare before him her own hopes, and he could tell her how far they bade fair to be realized. She burned with all this, and her desire struggled with her shyness, until at last it won, and she spoke, though with a good deal of tremor:

"Do you think, Mr. Carroll, that I could ever be an artist?"

"A musician? Yes. Certainly."

"Do you think that if I worked hard I could make money, by and by, as a singer?"

"Yes," he said again. "Certainly." He did not quite like the question about money. He himself had never felt the want of it, and he said in a grave way: "An ambition is not likely to lead you far beyond itself, Miss Moore. You must have a loftier aim than that if you wish to be an artist."

"Yes," she said, simply, "but I am obliged to think of money too. I should like to do something for my father, and I should like to take the heavier cares off my mother's shoulders. That is why I asked about money."

"That is quite right," he answered. "You will cost them something in the first instance, and it is only just that you should wish to repay it. You were taking lessons from Signora Malfi, were you not? You must choose a better instructor. It will not be difficult to find one. Will you leave the choice in my hands?"

She assented gratefully, and the impracticable young man laid another burden upon himself at once. Moore would never be able to pay the terms of the teacher of music to whom Tom intended that the girl should go, but he could make a private arrangement with him, and so save the farmer's pocket and his pride at the same time. It would only be a hundred or two, and he could save it in other ways, and besides that there was the opera, now nearly finished, and ready to be placed. Nobody as yet knew what an El Dorado the performance of that great work might lead to.

The teacher of Tom's choice was not the man whose name stood highest in London, but, in Tom's opinion, he was far and away the best, and it was likely that the young man's judgment was not greatly at fault. By special arrangement the teacher's terms were so subdued that the farmer was able to pay them, and Tom made up the difference.

The Moores knew nothing of his fall from fortune, though it is probable that he would have told them of it candidly enough had it come about in another way, and if they had not been in want of his assistance. And he himself was not fully persuaded that his father was immovable. Mark's letters, for one thing, were always cheering, and, if they were to be believed, his father was beginning to recognize the injustice with which he had acted. Tom could not fail to see how handsome and manly it was in Mark to try to throw himself out of the saddle in his behalf, and he felt extremely kind and grateful toward his cousin. A virtue which in himself would have seemed downright commonplace and inevitable was admirable in another in his eyes. This is not often the case with people, but then Tom Carroll was abnormally generous and sympathetic, looking much more at another man's side of the case than at his own, and seeing his own interests minified and another man's interests magnified, everywhere and always. That was not the practice of worldly wisdom, and,

in short, he was a young man born to be choused, humbugged, hoodwinked, and borrowed from. The chousers and borrowers mistook him for a fool, naturally enough, but then human estimates of human qualities and motives were made to differ from the beginning.

The Opera, being finished, was submitted to various authorities, and Tom Carroll began to know something of the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes. Nobody openly insulted him, but he saw his own work passed over for work which he knew to be inferior, only it had known names attached to it, and failed without imperiling the judgment of managers. The thing that galled him most was that publishers and critics and managers would let the score lie for a month together untouched, and then, on being reminded of its existence, would send it back with the seals unbroken. He was an impetuous young man, and at last, and after not so very long a time either, he came to an impetuous resolution He would take a theater on his own hook, bring out the opera in English as it stood, score a magnificent success—*cela va sans dire* to youthful genius, confident of itself—and shame all these sleepy and unawakenable wretches, who had missed their share of the glory. Also he would coin a pile of money, and rejoice in the sight of their cupidity from his own Tom Tiddler's Ground, whilst he picked up gold and silver which their itching fingers could not reach. He took nobody's advice about this step, and let nobody know of it.

To begin with, he examined his funds and found himself with a trifle over seven thousand pounds in hand. What might it take to bring out an opera in really befitting style? Two thousand pounds? He decided on that as being ample, sold his consols, and set the result to his own private account of the bank. Next he issued an advertisement, "Wanted, the services of a competent and experienced theatrical manager." This appearing in the "Era" drew on him a very snow-storm of correspondence, addressed to Alpha of such and such a number, in Ely Place. He sat over the letters for days, bewildered by an embarrassment of choice. It appeared beyond belief that there were or ever had been such a number of theatrical managers in England as he found to answer that advertisement. But there were only a few amongst the mass who gave reliable and definite information about themselves and their ante-

cedents, and having gradually winnowed these from the others, he sat down to weigh and consider their respective probabilities. After deep cogitation he selected one A.B. as being the most promising, and wrote to the said A.B. requesting an interview. A.B. had for six years managed the Oberon and for five the Garrick. His record at each of those popular houses was unimpeachable and open to inquiry. He had for the past six or seven years retired from active labor, but private speculations had proved unfortunate and he was willing to enter the ring again. Thus A.B., who wrote in a large hand, and a somewhat ponderous and polysyllabic style. Rectitude, business capacity, and misfortune in private speculation seemed, taken in conjunction, to promise well to Tom Carroll. The meeting was appointed to take place at Tom's own chambers, on a certain Monday, at midday, and the young fellow sat alone expectant. A ring at the bell apprised him of the probable arrival of his visitor; a knock at the door announced the visitor nearer.

"Come in," cried Tom.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said the maid, "by appointment."

And to Tom Carroll's wonder he beheld the portly form and the amiable smile of Mr. Anthony Bethesda.

"Good-morning, Mr. Carroll," said Mr. Bethesda, beaming humility and benevolence. "I received your letter, and though I did not know but that the name might be that of another gentleman, I half fancied that it might prove that you had some knowledge of me."

Mr. Bethesda's garments were still decidedly clerical in cut, but his white necktie had been set aside, in favor of a black stock, and he looked like a bishop in a mild disguise.

"I should not have thought that theatrical management had been at all in your line, Mr. Bethesda," said Tom, recovering a little from his surprise.

"I began life upon the boards," returned Mr. Bethesda, "and until the year '63 I remained in active connection with stage life. My record is remembered yet, I have reason to believe, and if you will take the trouble to refer to the gentlemen whose names I have given, they will speak of me favorably."

"Yes," said Tom, and demanded his terms. Mr. Bethesda gave them, and they seemed moderate enough.

"Whether I should be so fortunate as to meet your approbation or not, Mr. Carroll," said the applicant, "I should like to ask one favor of you if I may. May I rely upon you not to mention this application—at present at least—to any person you may happen to know in the immediate neighborhood of my present residence. I know the prejudice which exists amongst the breth—amongst religious people as a mass against the theatrical profession, and I might damage my own usefulness if my return or intended return to my old line of life were known."

"I have to concern myself with nothing, Mr. Bethesda," said Tom, "but your fitness for the position you ask for. If you have any private confidences, I shall respect them. I want a first-rate theatrical manager, and I must have one."

"I was said to be a first-rate manager in my day," said Mr. Bethesda, meekly, "and I have forgotten nothing. Except the profanity which once seemed necessary to the due fulfillment of a manager's duties."

"Well, Mr. Bethesda," said Tom, "I shall make inquiries in the direction your letter points me to, and I'll let you know within the week."

Mr. Bethesda withdrew, and Tom set about his inquiries that afternoon.

"Bethesda?" said the present manager of the Oberon. "Bethesda? Oh, yes! I knew Bethesda. Competent? Raythe r. Smart man was Bethesda—very smart indeed. Honest and reliable? We-el, I should *think* so. Never heard anything against him. Left everything here in apple-pie order. Gave perfect satisfaction. Mr. Bethesda coming back to business, sir? A decided acquisition, I should say, to any house in London."

So far good. Future inquiries confirmed this favorable verdict, and Mr. Bethesda was engaged.

"Now my first step, Mr. Bethesda," said Tom, "will be to rent a theater."

"I have made inquiries already," said the new manager. "The Garrick is in the market. Rent two thousand."

Tom Carroll whistled, but a moment's reflection reassured him. It would be ridiculous to include the year's rent of a theater in your estimate for bringing out a work. You *must* have a theater to begin with.

"First-rate house," said Mr. Bethesda. "Enjoys a good reputation, and is in fair repair. Has an admirable situation also. Shall I see about it?"

"Yes," said Tom, with a little inward chill, "you'd better see about it."

"And what are we going to produce, sir?" asked Mr. Bethesda.

"Opera," said Tom.

"Bouffe?" asked Mr. Bethesda.

"No. Serious opera."

"Italian?" asked Mr. Bethesda again.

"No. English."

Mr. Bethesda whistled.

CHAPTER XVI.

In four weeks' time the piece running at the Garrick dried up for want of audiences, and Tom entered upon his lease. Mr. Bethesda placed cunning paragraphs here and there, and did his best to excite public interest in the new fortunes of the house. The lessee and the manager held many lengthy consultations as to the artistes to be engaged, and Tom was for having everybody of the best to be got for love or money; but he paled a little at the terms people asked. He began to see in a fortnight or thereabouts that he was risking nearly everything, and that a failure would break him. This discovery, after depressing him for a little time, awoke all his energies, and he worked and schemed all the day and half the night. It was impossible to get together such a body of performers as he wished for without considerable delay, but before eight weeks had gone by, since Mr. Bethesda's engagement, the band was in rehearsal daily, and Tom was conducting in person.

At the second or third rehearsal, Mr. Bethesda entered with a card between his thumb and finger. He waited for a pause, and then handed the bit of pasteboard to his employer.

"I was unwilling to disturb you, sir," he said, "but the gentleman was so certain that you would admit him—"

"Where is he?" cried Tom, throwing down his bâton. In another minute he was in the corridor of the house, shaking hands with Baretti. "My dear old fellow! How

glad I am to see you! Why didn't you let me know of your coming? Come in, come in."

Baretti came in, after shaking hands half a dozen times. "I reached London this morning," he said, "and they told me at the old place where I should find you. What are you doing? Is your opera accepted?"

"Yes," said Tom, gayly. In spite of his anxieties he could be gay again at sight of his friend. "The opera is accepted by the lessee of the Garrick Theater, Mr. Thomas Carroll."

"You have taken the house?" asked Baretti, and Tom nodded in response. "Let me listen to the rehearsal. I must not interrupt your work. Go on."

Tom resumed the bâton and the work went on again, the little artist beating time with his hand and nodding his head to the music, as he stood in the dusk behind. The composer was ready to dismiss the band earlier than usual, for he was eager to talk with Baretti, but the new arrival would not hear of this, and the customary day's work was gone through. When the two friends at last quitted the theater and reached the clearer light of open day, Tom saw how pale Baretti was, and noticed a look of pain and trouble in his face.

"I have not been well," the painter answered to his inquiries, "and I have been uncomfortable. There is nobody at Naples. It was sad to be there, Carroll. The old friends are dead, or they have wandered away, or they are changed, and Naples is no place for me any longer."

"Have you been working too hard?" asked Tom. "You look as if you had."

"Perhaps I have," said Baretti. "I have had nothing but work to occupy me, and I have felt restless when away from it."

Tom took the little man home, and they spent the whole afternoon in talk.

"The scenery goes for something," said the painter, as they sat smoking together. "Have you made arrangements for it?"

"I have left all that to the manager," Tom answered. "It is in hand, I know, but I don't know who has it."

"You must let me paint one scene, at least," said Baretti, decisively; "I must have a finger in the pie."

"So you shall, old fellow," cried the other, and they

began to talk business, Tom laying down the lines of the opera, and Baretti listening, pencil in hand, and sketching as he listened.

The artist had not spoken of Mary, though she was uppermost in his thoughts, but he began to glide toward the mention of her name.

"Your father," he said, as he stooped over his drawing, "is he well?"

"I believe so," answered Tom.

"And all the people at Overhill?"

"They are all well according to the latest advices," said Tom, trying to speak carelessly. He could not as yet bring himself to tell of the separation which had taken place.

"I had expected to hear of your marriage before this," said Baretti quietly.

"That is deferred for a time," said Tom.

"Deferred?" asked Baretti, without looking up. "There is nothing the matter?"

"Well, there is," Tom answered, reluctantly. "I am not on very good terms with my father just at present."

"He disapproves of your having taken the theater?"

"No," said Tom. "He doesn't know of it. It's another matter. I'd rather not talk about it now, Baretti, if you don't mind."

"I beg your pardon," said the little man. The marriage deferred? What might that mean? That devil of Egotism, who lies in wait for every man, sprung out of him, and assailed him. Was there a straw of hope to cling to after all? But Baretti, in the dreary and lonesome days which had gone by since his departure from England, had slain that demon too often to be conquered by him now, and he put the tempting thought away from him. Only he felt that if he had guessed of any hitch, or the possibility of any hitch in Tom Carroll's love affairs, he would have stayed away from England still.

The upper rooms being still vacant, Baretti took them again and worked there as of yore. When he had first met Carroll on his return he had noticed no change in him, but with intimate intercourse there came times when the youngster was off his guard and let his care-worn face peep out from beneath the mask of cheerfulness he habitually wore. And the more care-worn and anxious Tom looked,

the oftener, and with the more force, Baretti's demon of egotistic hope assailed him, until the painter felt wretched with his own temptations, and ashamed of his own baseness, though he fought them like a hero. He would sit over his cigar in his friend's room of a night, watching Tom's thoughtful and anxious countenance with a look which his own self-accusations made tenderer and more watchful than it would otherwise have been, and once or twice the new lessee caught this fixed gaze, and seemed to read a sort of reproach in it. If he were sure of anything in the world, he was sure of Baretti's friendship, and so honest a devotion merited confidence. And besides that—setting his own delicacy apart—he wanted sympathy, and he was beginning to be sadly in need of hope, and he knew that Baretti would have both for him in plenty. So at last he told the story.

He met the little man's brooding, watchful glance so full one night, and his own glance recognized so completely the anxiety and friendship of it, that Baretti arose and laid both hands upon his shoulders.

"Carroll," he said, "I do not ask you for any confidence you do not care to give, but you are in trouble. Can I help you? Any way? You can ask me nothing that I will not at least try to do. You know that?"

It was in answer to this appeal that the story came out. There was a terrible temptation to Baretti's selfish hopes in it, but he listened quietly and fought his demon, and gave Tom in full measure all the sympathy and all the prophecy of ultimate success he stood in need of.

"Lording was right," cried the painter, marching up and down the room in his old way. "The money can not be allowed to make a difference. You are right also. Justify your own aspirations. Work. This is no world for idle people. Sweet are the uses of adversity, which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head. It is not natural to think that your father will always be wrong, and you will be all the better for having been thrown for a time upon your own resources. You will be a great man, Carroll. I tell you so, and I know what music should be. You have a spark of the fire Prometheus stole."

"I shall work," said Tom, a little shame-faced as usual at Baretti's enthusiasm. His friends at least believed in

him, and everybody knows what a help that is in any sort of doubtful enterprise.

"You will work," said Baretti, "and you will prosper. England is in need of some man to come to the front in music. When the right man comes she will answer."

"Yes," said Tom, "when the right man comes!"

"Work!" cried the painter, again turning upon him vehemently. "Believe yourself the right man, and do justice to the conviction. I never paint a picture which does not seem whilst I paint it the most excellent and beautiful in the world. I can see its faults a week after, but if it had faults whilst I worked at it I could do nothing. Believe in yourself. It is the only way to greatness."

Tom broke out laughing, and at that Baretti laughed also.

"But there is something in what I say after all," said the little man, with extreme gravity, a moment later.

At this juncture the maid tapped at the door, and, being invited to enter, asked for Mr. Baretti.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said the maid. "I went to your own rooms, sir, but I thought you might be here."

Baretti took the card from the salver the maid carried.

"Ask the gentleman to walk up to my rooms," he said. "This is my friend, Malfi," turning to Tom. "You remember meeting him once with me? I will bring him down by and by, and we will have a little music."

Now Tom was not particularly anxious to see Signor Malfi after what had happened with respect to Cousin Mark, but he had no such active objections to him that he could bring himself to forbid him his rooms. He could at a future time give Baretti a hint of what had happened, and Malfi would not be likely to come again. The painter went upstairs to meet his friend, and Tom lit his pipe and sat down to his score. Even now that the opera was in full rehearsal he could scarcely keep his fingers off it.

Baretti was lighting the gas when Signor Malfi presented himself. He kissed the artist on both cheeks, and the artist kissed him on both cheeks, and then they sat down and began to chatter animatedly about trifles.

"And how is madam?" asked Baretti in a minute or two. The singer stretched out a hand against him, as if to push that theme away.

"What is the matter?" asked the other in surprise.

"I have dismissed her," said Malfi, darkly. "She played me false. I have never thought of blaming you for it, but you began it."

"I began it?" cried Baretti, in amazement.

"You met me with Caterina one day in the streets," explained the singer. "There were two Englishmen in your company. One of them spoke Italian."

"Malfi," said the painter, "they are both as honorable and open as the day."

Signor Malfi's loud laugh of scorn at this declaration was not pleasant to listen to, nor was his face pleasant to look at when he laughed.

"If you suspect either of them, you wrong yourself," said Baretti.

"He used to visit her, I tell you," cried the operatic tenor, leaping to his feet and declaiming with prodigious gesture, "under pretense of teaching her his own accursed language. I hired an attic on the other side of the street, and watched them through my glasses for hours together, and saw them kissing one another. I tracked her one night to his rooms, and though he had hidden her somewhere when I followed her, I know that she was there. He came out when I had left to see if I were altogether out of the way, and in a little while she left his rooms alone. I followed her home and told her what I knew. It was a wonder I did not kill her then and there." If he had been half as enraged then as the telling of the story made him, it looked a wonder still. His swarthy face had taken an ugly tint of whitish-green, and his heavy lips were pallid and so dry that he had to moisten them between every sentence with his tongue. "I told her what I knew, and she proclaimed it all and dared me."

Baretti sat amazed.

"I bade her go," pursued Malfi, "and I threatened him. I told her that he should not live to boast of his conquest. Then this came out—that my visit to his rooms, whilst she was there, had so frightened him that *he* had cast her off. 'You may leave him to me,' said Caterina. She will kill him," he continued, with a rejoicing smile, "and then the law will hang her, and I shall have a safe revenge upon them both."

This reflection appeared to soothe him. He smoothed all his ruffled feathers at once, and, sitting down, lit a

cigar and smoked it, with the rejoicing smile now broadening and now fading in his eyes. Baretti had been ready with a question, which was stopped by this last statement. He had been about to ask how it was that the signora had not run to her lover when Malfi sent her packing, but the query was answered beforehand, and he sat silent. The singer also kept silence for a while, and, being left to himself, gradually assumed his ordinary aspect and manner; and they talked about indifferent things indifferently for half an hour, when Malfi rose to go. Baretti saw him out, and on his return to his own room was waylaid by Carroll.

"You didn't bring Malfi down after all," said Tom. "To tell you the truth, I'm glad of it. I don't want to meet him. There has been some disturbance between him and my cousin Mark."

"You knew of that?" asked Baretti.

"Yes," said Tom. "It seems that Malfi wasn't married to that woman whom he called his wife. Mark gave her lessons in English, and she took such a fancy to him that he got afraid of her and asked me to go and sit at the lessons to keep clear of scandal. I went once, and no more. But the lessons seem to have come to an abrupt termination; Malfi got jealous, and the woman left him."

"She was not his wife?" said Baretti. "I did not know that." Tom's account of the matter threw a new light upon it, and he was puzzled as to the true color and dimensions of the whole affair.

"Has Malfi said anything to you about it?" inquired Tom.

"Yes," said Baretti, and began to tell Malfi's story.

"I'll tell you exactly how it is," said Tom when the painter had finished. "The woman pestered Mark, as was fairly well proved by his asking me to go with him—she hunted him up at his chambers—this jealous Malfi fellow follows her—Mark to avoid a row hides her, and tells her afterward that she must bother him no more. It's as plain as a pikestaff."

Baretti said nothing and seemed to acquiesce in Tom's view of the case, but the whole thing set him thinking. He was not by nature of a very suspicious turn of mind, and he had been well disposed to Mark Carroll, but the idea had got fixed in him somehow or other that Mark had been making a cat's-paw of his unsuspecting cousin.

Baretti's life had not been what Tom's had been, and to an Italian youngster Mark's affected prudery looked affected. And having regard to Mark's present position in relation to Tom's affairs, the painter began to think that any attempt to hoodwink the said Tom would speak poorly for Mark's *bona fides*. Baretti would have thought little enough of an intrigue—until he fell in love—but he would have managed it by himself, and would not have tried to drag into it another who was innocent of it. If Mark had acted as he guessed, Mark was not to be trusted. Everything was vague enough just now, but there was ground for suspicion, and Baretti was uneasy in his friend's behalf.

His uneasiness led him to ask after a little time for a look at Mark's letters, and they more than half converted him, they were so hearty in their tone, and recognized so plainly the impossible motive of the elder Carroll's wishes. "In the meantime," wrote Mark, "I am, of course, in clover, and if it were not for a sense of your anxieties I should be comfortable. But there is nothing to be feared at the finish, and you have, in your mother's fortune, enough to live on for a dozen years in comfort, even if your father's mistaken animosity could last so long. But he is melting day by day, and though a constant advocacy would be injudicious with a man of his determined temper, I put in a word when I can, and it is easy to see that in a little while he will begin to show symptoms of relenting. Don't answer me, for I dare not have it known that I am in correspondence with you. And I rely upon you not to offend your father with me either now or hereafter by any proclamation of the part I played. I am too poor to dare to offend him." This all seemed honest enough, and it was hard in the face of it to retain suspicion, but Baretti was still a little uncertain, and would fain have kept a watch on Mark if he had seen the way to do it.

It had appeared upon inquiry that there was ample room for Baretti's efforts toward the fitting production of Tom's opera, and the devoted one spent a week or two in hard work at the designing of scenes and in superintending their execution. The acute Bethesda circulated new paragraphs respecting this. The celebrated artist had been especially retained to design the scenery and dresses. Baretti's recent pictures had brought his name a good deal

to the front, and the announcement was not without its value.

Tom wrote to Lording that the great work would appear at a given date, and the old boy took Mary up to town to hear and see it. The furniture in the town-house was stripped of its brown-holland grave-clothes—for why should the young people be kept apart more than need be?—and Tom, of course, was free of it and went and came as he pleased. Lording took to haunting the theater, and was amazingly proud to meet singers and bandsmen in the actual pursuit of their vocation behind scenes. Mr. Bethesda was publicly announced as Lessee and Manager, and Lording had no idea of Tom's venture in the business. The youngster was sorry for the deception, but Lording knew his financial position so well that Tom foresaw a quarrel, or something very like it, if the truth should be revealed. The elder would have been sure to want to share the risk, and Tom had fully determined that nobody else should endanger a penny. He lived in alternate hope and dread. Success meant everything he wished for. Failure meant the complete extinguishment of his hopes, except in the improbable contingency of his father's relenting. The young man's hopes and fears were in proportion to the reality of affairs, and his face looked worried and anxious.

But no hopes and fears can stop or hasten the course of the days, and the great night took its own time in coming. The house was crammed in all the better parts, but the gallery was very sparsely peopled. Nobody took notice of that significant fact except Mr. Bethesda. Tom conducted in person on this first night, and Lording and Mary had a private box almost immediately above him. Baretti sat in the stalls and saw them when he came in. They saw him also, and he was constrained to acknowledge their presence, though he would rather have passed unobserved. The thought of Mary's nearness disturbed him, so that he heard nothing of the music for the first half hour, and scarcely noticed the burst of applause which greeted his own stage picture when the curtains rose. Mary's thoughts about Baretti were contradictory. She had been longing to see him, and her heart's only good had been to hear of him for months past; and now that he was back again she was angry that he was there to disturb her loyalty to Tom, and to close her ears to Tom's opera.

The subject of the work was the story of Godiva, and Tom was his own poet and playwright, a fact which did not tell greatly in the opera's favor, perhaps. Yet the first performance went well; the principal performers were called and recalled, one or two movements were redemanded, and at the close the composer received what it is the fashion to call an ovation. It is probable that ovations went out of fashion in England with the hustings, but we keep the word for different uses.

Mr. Bethesda displayed a chastened joy, and Tom ran round to the box in which his goddess sat, and was there congratulated. The girl was going to marry him, and be loyal to him, and the very treason of her own heart made her anxious to be warm and kindly to the lover who had suffered so undeservingly. She thought with a flush of pride that she would have a man for a husband, and not a male clothes-horse, as ninety-nine out of every hundred of the society men she met seemed to be. For she despised the young men of average intellect, who made it a point to veil what wits they had, and she admired with all her heart the men of brains who wrote books and music, and painted pictures, and guided the destinies of States. You gave her more delight if you took her where she could change a word with a statesman, a popular writer, or a member of the Forty than she could extract out of a score of dancers, though she liked dancing well enough too, and was not indisposed to receive the admiration she met in a ball-room. To-night the whole world present had done homage to her husband who was to be, and the pride and joy in Tom's face was reflected in her own.

Baretti, who had been delayed in leaving the house by the slow stream that crawled idly out of stalls and balconies, could not refrain from one look in the direction of Lording's box. He knew where Tom had run to after his final bow, and he saw the glance almost of exultation with which the lovely woman held out both hands to welcome him. Lording and Tom, as the fates would have it, caught Baretti looking, and they both beckoned him so plainly that he could not pretend to have missed the invitation, and reluctantly made his way round to them. Mary schooled herself to receive him, and there was nothing in her manner or in his to indicate the tremor each felt at the other's presence.

The painter was pale and sad, but he brightened and warmed over his friend's success.

"I told you, Carroll," he said, "that there was a need for some man to come to the front in music. And I told you that England would listen when he came."

"We shall see," Tom answered, brightly. He was as happy as he had ever been. The fortune his father had taken from him so wrongfully might be restored or kept for Cousin Mark. He cared nothing for it. With the experience of that night behind him, he felt that he could carve his own way to fortune, and had no need of extraneous help. He was glad that for a time he had been thrown upon himself.

"You will excuse me now," he said. "I must not forget my company. I must run round and thank Roselli. He sung magnificently. So did Madame Lavigne. I must say a word to them. May I call for half an hour later on? Then, no good-byes at present. Will you come, Baretti?"

He ran down to the greenroom, followed by his friend, and the singers there applauded as he entered. Mr. Bethesda was opening champagne for the baptism of success, and Tom clinked glasses with a score of people. Everybody congratulated everybody, and the scene was particularly gay and animated.

"If we go on like this, Bethesda," said Tom, as he drew on his gloves and buttoned his overcoat to go, when all this exuberance was over and the room was cleared—"If we go on like this, Bethesda, we shall make our fortunes."

"Well, no, sir," returned Bethesda; "we sha'n't quite do that, but the thing is evidently going to be much less costly than I feared."

"You thought we should lose money on it," said Tom, lightly.

"Well, sir," said Bethesda, with his humble and compassionate smile, "that's inevitable, of course, where the house won't hold enough for the nightly expenses."

Tom Carroll fairly glared at the smiling manager until his smile faded, and he stood rubbing his hands with an aspect altogether rueful.

"Is that the case here?" he demanded, after pausing half a minute.

"I thought that was clearly understood, sir," he said.

"I laid the figures before you clearly. There has never been such a company got together before in a house like this, and after this night's reception the thing is safe to go for awhile. But if you cram the house every night, we're just five pounds under the sum of our working expenses. Taking to-night as representative, the loss would be fifteen pounds. The gallery was almost empty."

"Call it a loss of a hundred pounds a week, Baretti," said the successful composer, turning bluntly on his friend. "I can't afford to go on long at that rate."

"Call it two hundred a week, sir," said Bethesda, mildly. "It will be nearer that than the other."

"Then we sha'n't make our fortunes, after all, Bethesda," said Tom, recovering himself. "Good-night. Come along, Baretti."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Signora Caterina was walking along the Strand in a melancholy and despondent mood. She was not so well dressed as it had been her custom to be, not nearly so well dressed as she liked to be. Her finery was naturally all the worse for having been fine, and its showy colors gave signs of having been cleaned too often. Bronzed boots, gray at the toes, soiled lavender gloves mended, a plush coat or mantle creased and threadbare, and a hundred other signs of poverty and decay were noticeable about her. These broad indications of late outrageous finery and present poverty, taken in conjunction with the signora's silly habit of disfiguring her eyes and eyebrows, gave her an aspect which was worse than she deserved to wear, though it has been admitted already that she was not a model woman. But there are grades in everything, and she looked many grades lower than she had fallen, or was likely to fall.

She held her head well up, and walked with a certain pride and defiance in her aspect which made her shabby finery the more remarkable. Men stared at her broadly, women with sidelong glances of aversion drew away from her if she paused at a shop-window, and, proud as she looked, the tears were near her eyes pretty often. She was by no means a tearful young woman as a rule, but there are physical conditions which make room for the play of the more mournful emotions. One of these conditions

may be brought about by hunger, and the signora was hungry. The sensation until a day or two ago had been unknown to her. There are millions of people in the world who have never been hungry in their lives, and she had been amongst them. She had thought herself hungry often enough, and had always owned a fine, healthy appetite, which had made the dinner-hour a pleasant time, so long as it brought dinners with it. But now she knew what hunger meant, and its cruel, yearning nausea burned her, and bit at her, and sickened her, until she could have snarled like a wild animal at the unattainable tempting things to eat displayed in the shop-windows.

She had no purpose in being abroad, but it happened that wide London was the only home she owned just then. The Megatherium engagement had long ago come to an end, and no reward had followed it, nor had any other opening presented itself. She owned the clothes she stood in, and nothing more. Landladies have to live, like other people, and non-paying tenants admit the necessity for their own eviction, except in Ireland. To have been well-fed and well-dressed, and in a way courted and admired, made this destitution and despair the bitterer. There was one man whom she had to thank for it all, and he was the only creature who had ever given her a thought of purity since she been a little child, though the purity awoke somehow in her own heart, the gift of her own awakened nature, and not his gift at all. There was a way out of hunger even now, and if she had never seen Mark Carroll she would have taken it. People talk of virtue as if it were a fixed quantity; and that, of course, is sad nonsense. This young woman had been reared in a moral slum, and the surroundings into which she was born looked natural to her. Yet when a door opened and she beheld a room swept and garnished, she had native virtue enough to like the look of it and to long to dwell there. The pictures which garnished that figurative apartment might not be to your taste or to mine, but then you are a connoisseur in virtue, and your trained eye would detect the false color and the bad drawing, whilst hers looked with worship on the artistic daub. It was Mark Carroll who had seemed to open that door for her, and what she had to give she gave him in reward. It was certainly he who had tried to throw her back into the natal slum, and certainly he who had

shut the door in her face, and in proportion as she could have loved him she hated him. The pangs of hunger, the averted glances of women, and the garments drawn aside, were all added to Mark Carroll's score, and she was helpless to repay him. Bitter hunger, bitter hate, scorn, despair, self-pity—the signora's shabby plush mantle covered them all, and her black eyes sometimes failed to cover one or two of them.

To be miserable and homeless and unemployed leads—amongst other things—to a singular interest in trifles, and the signora stopped to regard countless objects she had never before cared to look at. With other matters of equal importance to her she looked curiously at the theatrical bills in the windows of Strand public-houses, or at the doors of the theaters themselves. Her knowledge of English was by this time considerable, and she could read with some approach to comfort. One announcement (which attracted her attention neither more nor less than a dozen others she had seen already and had stood to read) set forth that the magnificently successful English opera "Godiva" would be repeated until further notice. A smaller bill beside it ran thus—"Garrick Theater. Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr. Bethesda. 'Godiva,' written and composed by Thomas Carroll, Esq."

She read no further, but stood and stared at the name. That was the man of whose kindness and generosity Baretti had spoken to Tito, and he was the stupid innocent whom Mark had brought to Tito's chambers on his last visit there. There were not likely to be two Thomas Carrolls who were composers, and she had heard the one she knew of play superbly, and had heard all about him from Baretti. It was perfectly clear that this was Mark's cousin, and his printed name hit her almost as Mark's own would have done.

Whilst she stood looking at the placard somebody touched her in passing, and she on turning round saw Tom Carroll with his hat raised in apology. The placard was at the main entrance of the theater.

She saw that at first sight he did not recognize her, but she called up as much of a smile as she could, and held out her hand,

"Good-day, Mistare Carroll."

Tom was chivalrous and, in some ways, weak-hearted.

He could not resist the proffered hand, though he took it reluctantly. Some men might have thought the woman's recognition insolent, but he was not amongst them.

"Can you speak a word to me?" she asked, holding his hand.

Two or three people in the street turned to look at them. The painted woman, with her gorgeous finery all faded and dirty and threadbare, holding the young swell's hand in broad daylight, and looking at him with appealing eyes—the young swell shame-faced at the recognition—the story was plain to anybody who saw the picture.

"Come inside," said Tom, waving his free hand toward the entrance of the theater.

Fashionable people do occasionally walk eastward along the Strand, and Lording, who made no pretense of being fashionable, passed on the other side at that moment. He naturally looked over at the theater at which Tom's opera was running, and he saw in the door-way what was to be seen. It looked for all the world as if Tom had been seized by the woman, and were drawing her in-doors to escape observation. Lording walked on and tried to think no more about it, but it rankled in his mind.

"What can I do for you?" Tom asked the signora, when they were once behind the swinging-doors.

She had scarcely meant to appeal to him at all, but her own case was desperate, and perhaps he could give her a chance.

"I have lost my latest place," she answered. "I have nothing to do three months. I am quite poor. Will you let me sing in your opera to earn a little money? You have hear me sing."

"I am sorry," Tom began, and he saw that the woman's face fell wofully. The eager, beseeching light faded from her eyes, and the young man had already noticed how fallen away from her old state she was. "I'm *afraid* there's no vacancy." He was losing money every day, and drawing nearer and nearer to the great gulf of poverty. The opera was running at a heavy loss, though to the uninitiated it looked like a success; and it was only being allowed to run at all lest its immediate withdrawal should blight his future chances with a managerial world. He could ill afford to offer an asylum to anybody just now, and he disliked this woman and had a prejudice against her, a

prejudice sufficiently justifiable and reasonable. "I am sorry," he said again.

Now the signora had never had to stoop to sue before. Only that very morning her landlady had refused longer to harbor her, and in her pride and anger she had disdained to plead for a day's reprieve. There is something in the confession of suffering which seems to render it for the moment less bearable, and her own words, "I am quite poor," meant so much for her, and touched her with such a spasm of pity for herself, that at this refusal she began to cry.

"If I can help you in any other way," said Tom, drawing out that too ready purse of his.

"No, no, no," she cried, waving her hand against it. "I will work if I can." Her English carried her no further. Her emotion tied her tongue.

"Come this way," said the yielding composer. "I'll see if we can find room for you." She followed him, drying her eyes and striving to subdue herself to quiet. She despised herself for yielding so, and rebelled against the fortune which had driven her to this appeal. But she was starving, and that for a healthy woman is not a slight thing, and she had a reason for keeping alive as long as she could. Her physical hunger for food was not much stronger than the hunger her heart felt for revenge. How the revenge was ever to come about she could not guess, but if she could compass it, she would have it, by hook or crook, and at whatever sacrifice.

"Wait here, if you please," said Tom, offering her a chair in a room opening off the auditorium. She took a seat and composed herself, and then, sighting a looking-glass, went to it and arranged her tawdry ribbon to the best advantage, and wiped the smeary paint from her eyelids as well as she could.

"Can we make room for another soprano, Bethesda?" he began. "I know we don't want one, but another won't matter much."

"That is for your own consideration, sir," replied Bethesda. "The expenses are already heavy."

"I know," said Tom, taking off his hat to rub his hair, and staring at Bethesda with a vexed countenance, "I know. But this is a woman who—hang it all! We *can* make room, I suppose?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly, if you wish it," said the manager. He knew nothing of Tom's concerns. When he had heard the Moores speak of him it had been in connection with that dairy business, and he had been represented as a man of wealth and as having a wealthy father. Mrs. Moore's views of the elder Carroll's possessions was exaggerated, and Bethesda had caught it. And besides, a poor man could scarcely afford such a whim as to take a theater for the performance of an opera which no business-like manager would look at. Tom's work was in one respect like Shakespeare's: the smallest part needed an artist to play it, and his stage was full. Business-like managers are not fond of pieces in which there are many people to play the leading parts. In Tom's day one star and a bundle of sticks did for most of the London houses.

"Well, you'd better see to her," said Tom, "I don't want to be bothered with her again." Mr. Bethesda looked vaguely sympathetic. "She's in want of money, I know, and when you've agreed on the terms you'd better give her a fortnight's salary in advance, or something of that sort."

"Very good, sir," returned Mr. Bethesda, and Tom sat down whilst the manager went to confer with Caterina. When Bethesda, returning, announced her engagement and departure, he left the house and went about the business her appeal had interrupted. His own extravagances began to make him discontented with himself, and he knew that he was sinking fast enough without. And yet how could he have denied the miserable woman when he saw her in tears and all the signs of poverty she bore! Nothing short of the practical experience of a relieving officer could have hardened his heart or closed his hand whilst there was anything to give in it. Yet his charities began to worry him, as little sins worry a tender conscience, and there were moments when the financial outlook was almost desperate.

He was not going quite madly with his opera, and he and Baretti had talked over the question of its continuance pretty thoroughly. His plan was to run it as long as he dared, and in the meanwhile to set to work at a second, which upon completion should be produced on another lessee's responsibility. All the critics were in his favor, and after this success of his, he would be treated with more consideration than he had been. He was a good deal

mixed with theatrical people now, and everybody was extremely amiable with him. Men who knew about stage affairs were cognizant of his real position at the Garrick, though he never guessed it, and amongst them were some who were willing to pick up a few of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Not a few envied Bethesda, and that good man spoke of his patron as a sort of Crœsus. A moneyed amateur is likely to be popular in theatrical circles, and Tom's amiability, his goodness of heart, his ready sympathy and open hand, made him more than a common favorite. When he remembered how friendly everybody was in his new world, he forgot the rapid wasting of his little fortune, and with everybody's good word secured beforehand his future triumphs looked certain. Cousin Mark would have known better, for a man who encounters every other man as a pretender will be right sometimes.

Talking of Cousin Mark—the new heir to Trench House found Trench House a little dull, and the keenest sense of humor in the world, backed by the most relishing sense of triumph, could not stave off a feeling of occasional weariness in the society of Mr. Carroll. It was a great relief to Mark, therefore, when his uncle one day suggested that a week or two in town might be a change for him. He threw a certain graceful air of reluctance into the little speech in which he accepted the holiday, and he executed a dance in the privacy of his bed-chamber at the prospect of liberty. There was certain legal business to be done in town, and Mark's professional knowledge would be useful in it, so thought Mr. Carroll. Mark fancied he could trust his professional knowledge to drag out the proposed fortnight into a month, and he set out in subdued high spirits. From the first day of his adoption of this admirable nephew, Mr. Carroll had bestowed an allowance upon him, and until now Mark had had no chance to spend a penny. As a consequence he was better provided than he had ever been in his life before, and since he had been really hard-up in his time, the possession of money afforded him a joy which is out of the reach of a man who has never felt poverty. Mark had given up his chambers, and the meager furniture had been sold at a valuation, so that now he went to a Jermyn Street hotel and bestowed himself comfortably. The London papers appeared daily on Mr. Carroll's break-

fast table, and Mark knew all about Tom's opera and its success. He had seen the advertisements, and read the criticisms, and he had little doubt that his uncle had done the same, though Tom's name was never mentioned between them. Mark had no objection to his cousin's well-doing so long as it did not interfere with his own, and, as a matter of fact, the more Tom thrived the less likely was his father to be stirred by any sentiment of pity, and the less likely was Tom to be a tax upon his cousin.

"I never cared much for opera," said Mark to himself. "But the papers say that the ballet is a good thing. I'll go and have a look at it."

So a night or two after his arrival in town Mark made one of a fairly filled house to hear "Godiva." For a wonder he was in time for the opening chorus, and there in the center of the stage semicircle was the Signora Caterina. Mr. Bethesda had not been slow to observe the young woman's personal advantages, and her place was prominent. It was undeniable that she helped the stage picture, whilst as a chorus singer she was useful.

"Tom," said Mark, inwardly, "you are indiscreet. You make that Christian duty of mine almost too easy."

Mark seemed pretty safe in the saddle by this time, but he thought the girths might bear a little tightening.

He cared little for the opera, and fell to reading the bill of the play.

"Eh?" he thought suddenly. "Bethesda? Mr. Anthony Bethesda? How many Anthony Bethesdas are there in the world? Not many, I should say. 'Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr. Anthony Bethesda.' Curious."

The ballet came on just then—a quaint old English morris-dance, not at all to the young man's taste. He preferred the can-can, though even that had lost its novelty; and after watching the figures on the stage for an uninterested five minutes he took his overcoat from the attendant and strolled into the vestibule of the house.

"Bethesda," he was thinking still. "Not at all a common name. The man himself. Mr. Bethesda in person in the vestibule. I should know that Christian smile amongst a thousand. How d'ye do, Bethesda?"

"How do you do, sir?" said Mr. Bethesda, with a somewhat blank expression.

"How's the little business over the water, Bethesda?"

asked Mark, jauntily. "And the brethren? How *are* the brethren?"

"For God's sake—" said Bethesda in a whisper. Mark laughed.

"All right," he said, lightly. "Where can we go and be quiet for a minute or two? I want to speak to you."

"Come into my room, sir," said Mr. Bethesda, and Mark followed his lead.

"What brings you here, old man?" he asked, familiarly. Mr. Bethesda had taken the precaution to lock the door, and he looked frightened as he faced his visitor. "Made your pile, eh? Is the new dodge paying?"

"Well, I can't say it is, sir," returned Bethesda, whose plump and roseate countenance looked almost meager on a sudden. "I'm as poor as Job, I am indeed. I am only a salaried servant here."

Mark had taken a seat upon the table, and there dangled his legs at ease, looking at the manager with a waggish eye of mastery. At this declaration he stretched out his walking-cane and tapped a line in the play bill on the door.

"Sole lessee, Bethesda. Sole lessee. There it is in black and white."

"A mere form, sir, I assure you. I'm as poor as Job. I have nothing but my salary to depend upon."

"Pooh!" said Mark. "I have inherited a large fortune, Bethesda, and I don't want to blackmail you any more. Come, you can trust me. If the house isn't yours, whose is it?"

"It is taken in my name, sir, but as a matter of fact, it's rented by a person by the name of Carroll, who took it to bring out his own opera."

"A person of the name of Carroll, eh?" said Mark, smilingly. "He seems to have mounted it pretty well. Cost a fairish penny, didn't it, Bethesda?"

"It is very richly mounted," said Mr. Bethesda, who seemed ill at ease.

"Is it paying?"

"No," said the manager, shaking his head mournfully. "Losing. At least a hundred and fifty pounds a week."

"Bad for the person of the name of Carroll, eh?" asked Mark.

"Wealthy men have whims, sir," returned Bethesda. "He can afford it."

"Ah," said Mark, who wore throughout this interview a curious air of enjoyment, which contrasted strongly with the other's evident discomfort. "That makes a difference, doesn't it? And how *is* the little business over the water?"

"Gone to pieces," said Bethesda mournfully. "The biggest *coup* I ever went for was the last, and it smashed me. It was beautifully done, beautifully, and somebody must have turned informer. There were seven boilers," sinking his voice to a whisper, and looking round, as if he feared another listener, "seven boilers laid on the quay for five or six weeks for everybody to get used to the look of them. Then they were got aboard and sent down for repair."

"Sent down?" said Mark. "Sent down where?"

"Down North generally," returned Bethesda, with a feeble smile. "The departure was admirably timed, sir, and the boilers were landed at Cardiff, made over to a safe hand there. They nailed him, however, and it burst both of us. I knew I could rely upon him, and he was honorable to the end. Five years is a light sentence, of course, but some men would have turned Queen's Evidence."

"What was it?" said Mark, smilingly.

Mr. Bethesda went through a little pantomime expressive of smoking a cigar, and blew an imaginary whiff.

"The best havanas to be had for love or money. The low trade never paid."

"I suppose not. And that burst you, did it?"

"Like a bubble, sir," returned Mr. Bethesda. "I suppose that altogether I wasn't less than five thousand pounds out of pocket by it. But the problem of long interest and short risk has never been satisfactorily solved, and never will be. If you could rely upon everybody's honesty now!"

"It's a pity you can't do that, Bethesda, isn't it?" said Mark, smilingly. "And so the person by the name of Carroll is losing a hundred and fifty pounds a week, is he? By the way, Bethesda, who's that handsome foreign-looking woman in the chorus?"

"Signora Caterina, sir?" asked Bethesda, with a look of relief. "Is that the lady you mean?"

"She stands back in the center of the stage in the first chorus. I thought her rather handsome. Who is she?"

"That *is* Signora Caterina," said Mr. Bethesda. "Mr. Carroll introduced her here, sir. I don't know anything about her."

"A private affair of Mr. Carroll's perhaps?" asked Mark.

"Well, no, sir, I don't think so. It may have been in the past, but it isn't now, I'm certain. No. That isn't his line, I should say, sir. I confess that at first I thought it might be, for he asked me to get the prettiest girls I could, but he's never so much as looked at one of them."

"How did he come to bring the lady here?"

"I haven't a notion, really," replied Bethesda. "She was awfully shabby—awfully shabby, when she came. He gave her a fortnight's wages in advance."

Mark nodded smilingly, and looked as if about to put another question, when a knock came to the door, and a second later the handle was tried. Bethesda ran to the door and unlocked it.

"Hillo!" cried Tom Carroll, entering, and looking with amazement from one to the other, "Why, Mark, what brings you here?"

"I ran up to town to see you," said Mark, with perfect self-possession. "I met Bethesda in the vestibule, and he and I have been having a little talk together. We are old acquaintances. Bethesda is the only client I ever had."

"And how are you?" cried Tom, shaking hands heartily. It may seem singular, but he had no malice for Mark. Such a supposition would have seemed singular indeed to Mark himself. He had thought the matter over pretty often, and he admitted that if their fortunes had been reversed, he would have poisoned Tom if that could have been managed safely. Anybody would, said Mark. It came natural.

He answered Tom's salute with perfect responsiveness.

"You'd better see to that latch, by the way, Bethesda," said he, with a laugh. "If Mr. Carroll had caught you locked in with one of those pretty girls you have here, he wouldn't believe you'd done it because the latch wouldn't act, and you only wanted to keep the wind out."

"What's the matter with the latch?" asked Tom, trying the handle of the door. "It's all right now."

"It wasn't a minute ago," said Mark, easily.

"Who would have thought of your knowing Bethesda!"

said Tom, brightly. "What a little world it is, after all! Why, Bethesda, it was only yesterday that you told me you had never met anybody of the name of Carroll, and you and my cousin Mark are closeted here like old chums."

Mr. Bethesda gave an odd little look at Mark Carroll.

"I had forgotten the gentleman, sir," he answered, "until he did me the honor of reminding me of our old connection this evening, sir."

"Come and have a talk, Tom," said Mark, thrusting an arm through his cousin's. "Good night, Bethesda."

"Good night, sir," said Bethesda, and stood staring at the door-way through which the two had passed. "He's a beautiful liar," he said a minute later, as he closed the door. "Very ready and natural. Carroll? Mark Carroll? Now what did *he* want an alias for?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Tom felt, as he and his cousin walked together after leaving the theater, that Mark's manner had never seemed half so agreeable or befitting. He did not think this, but he felt it warmly. There was no shyness about Mark, as there would have been about some men in the circumstances, and there was no pretense of there being nothing the matter.

"Tom," said Mark, "I want to have a serious talk with you. I want to ask you to answer one question I shall put to you."

"I will if I can," said Tom, not guessing what the question might be.

"Then," began Mark, stopping short in the street and facing his cousin with a serious brow, "is there anything between yourself and your father which is not known to me? Anything more than that row at the Megatherium?"

"Nothing that I know of," Tom answered. "Why?"

"I am obliged to move slowly," said Mark, taking his cousin's arm again, and walking with thoughtful eyes upon the pavement. "I dare not appeal to him too often, but I want to see you reconciled, and I mention you when I dare. But lately he has dropped a hint or two of your having offended him in other ways."

"In what other ways?" asked Tom, a little angrily.

"Well, you see," said Mark, musingly, "he doesn't speak straight out, and I don't want to make him angry by questioning; but so far as I can gather, he has a notion that you've been living in rather an immoral way up here."

"Who?" cried Tom, coming to a standstill. "I? How?"

"My dear fellow," said Mark, in a propitiatory way, "don't fly out at me. I am only trying to get at the bottom of the thing. Don't be offended if I go on. Has there ever been or is there now any entanglement between you and—? Come, Tom, I'm not a Joseph myself, and I never professed to be. Is there a lady in the case at all, or has there been?"

"You might have answered any charge of that sort," returned Tom, "out of your knowledge of me."

"If there is such a charge, there is no truth in it?"

"Not an atom," said Tom, quietly enough.

"Have you made an enemy?" asked Mark. "Is there anybody with a grudge against you?"

"Not a soul I know of."

"Tom," said Mark, suddenly, after a pause, "don't you think you ought to write to the governor and make some approach to him? Don't answer yet. Don't you think you might make allowance for him, and even humiliate yourself a little for his sake?"

"Mark," said Tom, in answer, in a voice which showed how moved he was, "if my father had been a poor man I would have gone to him next day, and would have told him that I had not done well in risking his peace of mind to save Miss Moore an inconvenience. But he is a rich man, Mark, and he was as much in the wrong as I was. If he had not refused to believe me, I would have proved my case, since he demanded it. He had a right to demand it, but he had no right to think me a liar. That is a right I never yet gave to any man."

"Without an advance from you," said Mark, "a reconciliation does not look hopeful. He is beginning to think all manner of evil things about you."

"It's a great pity," said Tom, with a sigh, "but it can't be helped." He thought of the difference the last few months had made in his position and prospects, and his heart sunk at it; but there came the natural revulsion of defiance, and this extended itself to his father. "He must

do what he will and think what he will. I must fight my own way in the world. I should be happy in his good opinion, but, much as I value it, I prefer my own, and I will not lose that at least."

Mark sighed audibly.

"There's a pair of you," he said. "Irreconcilables both." To this his cousin returned no answer, and they walked on quietly for a hundred yards or so. "Tom," began Mark again, "I give you my word of honor that I feel my own position keenly. Perhaps I am a bit cowardly about myself for one thing. You know how helpless I am in the world. I'm like a child. I never earned a penny in my life."

"You had a client once," said Tom.

"Yes," said Mark, fortunately recalling his statement about Bethesda. "I earned a ten-pound note once, but it came to the same thing—I never got it. I am dependent on your father, and since my own governor died I always have been. Well, you know, you and I have both looked forward to his doing something for me finally, and now he's in such a mood that if I pushed your case too far he'd send me packing after you, and found a hospital. Now that would be good neither for me nor you, and it wouldn't be comfortable for him. And all the time I am in a false position. I am ill thought of in many quarters where I would rather stand well, because people say what a cold-blooded thing it is for a fellow to accept a position which holds father and son apart. They don't know what I am trying to do, and would hardly believe me if I told them. Now can't you make me your mediator? Can't I say we met, and that you spoke kindly of him and all that sort of thing, and expressed your sorrow for having troubled him?"

"I can do nothing, and say nothing, that does not lay me open to suspicion," answered Tom. "You may tell him what I have said already, if you like. Does he seem to feel the thing much, Mark?"

"He doesn't show a great deal," Mark answered, "but then you know his way."

Yes, Tom admitted that he knew his father's way. The future was beginning to look blank to Tom; his money failure in connection with the opera tormented him, and his ideas seemed to have run dry, so he made no progress,

to speak of, with opera number two. His troubles were closing fast upon him, and all the lesser troubles he endured drove him toward one much greater. His love-affair looked especially hopeless, and that was the one thing he could least endure not to hope about. It seemed as if to take his hope of that were to take all, and the more he thought of it the less possible it seemed to marry and become a pensioner on Lording's bounty. It is probable enough that, like many other people, he made most of his own troubles for himself, but home-made troubles are no more savory than those of foreign manufacture, and the lad's mild gorge rose at them.

"I say," quoth Mark, rather suddenly, "is that your own speculation, Tom—that theater?"

"Yes," said Tom, with no great sprightliness of tone.

"Is it paying?"

"Losing fast."

"Shall you drop it?"

"I dare not—at least not just yet."

"It seems to me, Tom, that unless your governor relents you are in a bad way."

"A very bad way indeed, Mark; but not so bad a way that it may not be mended."

"You must let me say something to your father. Give me a message to him."

"No. You are a good fellow, Mark, but that affair must take its course. I can't beg for a right as a favor. I didn't deserve to be thrown over, and I can't ask to be taken back again."

This talk brought them to Tom's door. Mark declined to enter just then.

"Think it over, Tom. I've said what I wanted to say. Think it over. I'll call to-morrow at midday, if that will suit you. Good-night, old man."

He wrung Tom's hand hard and walked away hurriedly.

"He's a good fellow, is Mark," said Tom to himself, standing on the door-step and looking after his cousin's retreating figure. "A good fellow."

"An odd thing," said Mark, falling into a saunter as he turned the corner into that street in which he had first met the charming signora. "A curious thing how being in the fashion makes one fond of the fashion. Since I took to having respectable motives it is wonderful to notice what

a hold they have taken on me. I shall end in believing myself like the rest of them. We're poor creatures—all frail alike,'' concluded Mark, with a laugh to himself. "All frail alike.''

As he walked down the street thinking, he passed a solitary passenger, who looked keenly at him and quickened his step a little as if to keep pace with him for a moment and make sure of him. This solitary passenger was Signor Malfi.

"You are still in London, my friend,'' said the signor silently, when he was sure of him. "Let me see where you live.''

He followed, but not for any great distance, for at the end of the street a voice he knew hailed Mark Carroll by name, and the signor crossed the street in the darkness to avoid his countryman, Baretti.

"You are back in London?'' said Baretti. "Have you seen your cousin?''

"I have just left him,'' returned Mark. "You have some influence with him. Beg him to follow my advice. It is the only way to a reconciliation with his father.''

"What is your advice?'' asked Baretti.

"That he should seek the reconciliation,'' returned Mark. "That he should make the first advances.''

"Do you think the advances likely to be accepted?'' asked Baretti.

"I think it well worth while to try. I've told Tom so, but he's pig-headed.''

"I am anxious to serve him if I can,'' said the painter. "Shall I walk with you whilst you tell me what to do?''

Mark accepted this offer, and the two went on together arm-in-arm. Signor Malfi, who had been standing in the darkness fifty yards further down the street, walked leisurely until they passed him, and then followed.

"You have met my uncle and have seen enough of him to know how unlikely it is that any advance should come from him. He is a man of prodigious firmness—not to say obstinacy—but one of the kindest-hearted men in the world. Tom must pocket his pride and make submission.'' Baretti nodded here and there as Mark talked and the disinterested cousin grew warm with his theme.

"Take no notice of the thing now,'' said Baretti, break-

ing in on the current of Mark's speech. "But do you know why you are being followed?"

"Followed?" asked Mark, quietly. "What do you mean? Why should I be followed?"

"There is a friend of mine behind us," said the painter, "who has a grievance against you. He was behind you when I met you, but thinking that I did not see him, he crossed the road and waited. Now he is coming on again."

"A friend of yours who has a grudge against me?" asked Mark. "And who may that be?"

"Count twenty paces beyond the next lamp," said Baretti. "Then turn and you will have him in the light."

So said, so done. Mark knew well enough of whom Baretti spoke, and was not surprised at being followed, though the sensation he experienced was far from being comfortable. He and Baretti wheeled round suddenly at the point agreed upon, and Signor Malfi came to a dead stop for a second or so, and then walked on toward them. Mark stood on the alert, waiting for what might happen. He had not long to wait, for Malfi cut right at his face with the walking-cane he carried. Mark warded the blow with his own cane, but before he could return it, Baretti had got in between them, and for a minute or two the painter and the singer made a great hubbub with expostulation on the one side and execration on the other. Mark kept quiet and watched, cool and wary. To have a quarrel with Signor Malfi would not suit him at all, for he was severely moral at Trench House, and enjoyed a reputation for another and more genial sort of morality—unstarched, but unsmirched—in its neighborhood; and the revelations which might come of a fracas with the popular tenor would militate against his reputation. On the other side, Malfi cared little for the prospect of a bout at fisticuffs, and repented his flush of passion already. So with both unwilling to fight, the promised battle was postponed, but the assailant cursed from behind Baretti with Italian fluency, and let out all the story. This was, of course, unpleasant for Mark, who had tried to make something of a cat's-paw of his cousin in this matter, and who knew that the story would go from Baretti to Tom. Even such a fool as Tom might scarcely like to have been used as a

blind in such an affair, and for the present it was part of Mark's plan that Tom should think well of him.

"I have no appetite for a street-brawl," said Mark, in English, "and the man is mad with an absolutely groundless jealousy."

"What does he say?" cried Malfi, with an energetic pretense of a desire to get past Baretti. Baretti, still keeping between him and Mark, translated, and the singer broke out with a new tirade. One foot-passenger paused long enough to hear all three speaking Italian, and, being in his own way a humorist, cried, "Go it, Frenchy!" in a highly exhilarated way.

"We shall have a crowd here in a moment," said Mark, in an under-tone, to Baretti. "I shall walk on until I meet a policeman, and if your friend follows me I shall give him in charge."

So saying, he turned his back upon the two, and marched along, indifferent enough to outer seeming, but carrying his heart in his ears.

"You call yourself my friend," said Malfi, hotly, "and you consort with that dog."

"I consort with that dog for a purpose," said Baretti, "and I still call myself your friend. I must not lose him now. Let me follow him. Come to me to-morrow. What can you gain by a disturbance in the streets? I may help you to right your wrong in a way you do not dream of. Come to me to-morrow."

Malfi made no answer, but he allowed Baretti to follow Mark, and only stood to watch the two retreating figures until the night swallowed both of them. Then he shook his stick in the air, spat on the pavement, and went his way. The painter came up with Mark at a run, and Mark, having assured himself that it was Baretti, and not Malfi, who pursued him, sauntered slowly to be the more readily overtaken.

"Thank you," he said, when Baretti came alongside, "I am very much obliged. About Tom, Signor Baretti; will you try and persuade him to make some approaches to his father?"

"I will advise him for the best," said Baretti. "It is a pity that so excellent a son and so kind a father should be divorced from each other."

"Isn't it?" said Mark, with an assent almost tender in its fervor.

"It is a pity, too," observed Baretti, "that my poor friend Malfi should be divided from his wife by so groundless a suspicion. So far as you are concerned she is innocent?"

"The man's a madman, pure and simple," said Mark, tranquilly. "I think the woman took a fancy to me, but that wasn't my fault. Ask my cousin Tom. He'll tell you that I asked him to sit out an English lesson I was giving her, to prevent her from making eyes at me." It was not easy to suspect so perfect a tactician.

"This is not the first I have heard of it," said Baretti, who also knew how to be candid. "Malfi told me the whole story. He said then what he repeated to-night, that he had tracked her to your chambers."

"She was fool enough to come there," Mark returned. "That was not my affair either. Whilst she was there Malfi turned up, and I hid her. When he had gone away, I told her I couldn't stand that sort of nonsense, and that, if it occurred again, I should have to take unpleasant measures. You read the English poets, Mr. Baretti, and you remember the line 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.' The beautiful Signora Malfi is the best illustration of that statement I have yet encountered. I'm not a Joseph myself," said Mark, for the second time that day, "but in this case I'm a martyr."

Mark's candor was his best weapon, but he could not quite kill Baretti's doubts of him.

"You disliked the woman?" the painter asked. "That is why you wished your cousin to go with you when you gave her the lesson you speak of?"

"Well, not exactly that," said Mark, with a light-hearted laugh. "But the game didn't seem worth the candle, and besides that, Malfi was a friend in a sort of a way, and there is honor, you know, even amongst gentlemen."

Baretti walked thoughtfully on and said nothing. The man made no pretense to be better than he was, and his easy cynicism made him ten times more readily believable than any moral profession could have done. And yet Baretti was not easy in his mind about him, and to doubt him at one point was to doubt him at all. Half unconsciously he did doubt him at all points, and he began to have vague

ideas that it was here if ever that his chance of being useful to Tom Carroll would arise. As if there were not real dragons enough about his friend's path already, he was in the mood to create fancy dragons for the pleasure of killing them, and circumstances had given Mark so much influence over his cousin's life that Baretti was nine-tenths jealous of him. Now that he had come to think of it, he had never heartily liked Mark Carroll from the first, and a spice of that discontent which Mark confessed would have been natural in Tom, began to flavor Baretti's fancies. What guarantee in the world was there that Mark should play fair with Tom? And what would the world think fairer play than to let things take their course? But if Mark allowed events to run on unguided, it was likely that he, and not Tom, would inherit the Trench House estates. It began to be unbelievable, as Baretti considered these things, that any man would take the trouble to shake his own standing-ground unless he had a very strong reason for it—some passion of honor, or gratitude, or love. Now, not to be unduly suspicious, it did not seem likely that Mark Carroll was a man to nurse so fine a sense of honor as his present pretensions claimed for him, and, so far as the painter knew, he had no great call either to love or to gratitude.

Baretti had spoken all these half-proved fancies about Mark in his last words to Malfi, when he had said that he might help to right his countryman's wrongs in a way the other did not dream of. If Mark were pretending to serve Tom's interest while he played against him, there were not many revenges to which Baretti would not have thought it dignified to stoop.

"You are naturally anxious about your cousin," he said at last, "and I am naturally anxious about my countryman. Whilst you try to reconcile father and son, I must try to reconcile husband and wife. Do you know that the lady is singing in your cousin's opera?"

"Yes," said Mark, since there was nothing to be got by ignorance. "I saw her there this evening."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No. I only saw her on the stage. Why the deuce *should* I speak to her?"

"People are very stupid," said Baretti, leaving Mark's query unanswered. "They quarrel without cause, and

they give themselves and their friends a great deal of needless trouble. I will speak to your cousin, Mr. Carroll, and I will do my best for him. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Mark, in a voice which responded sympathetically to the weariness of Baretti's. "It's a poor world, Mr. Baretti, and one's best resource is not to care for it very much." He gripped the Italian's hand, said "Good-night" again, and walked toward his hotel. That unexpected disturbance with Malfi had been got out of well enough, and Mark was grateful to his own good fortune. But to have that sort of thing happening at odd times would be unpleasant, if at last the coward's passion did not make him dangerous. Mark was certain of Malfi's cowardice, but counted on no immunity from danger on that score; for he had had opportunities of studying the dirty side of human nature in the assize courts, and he knew of what base metal homicides are made.

But, apart from fears so tragic—and Mark was no coward—to have a man of that sort about, ready at any time to knock one's respectability to pieces, was eminently undesirable, and yet to be rid of him seemed impossible. He could be dodged and evaded at times, no doubt, but then there was no certainty as to the time or place of his appearance.

Mark's cogitation on this matter bore fruit. It is noticeable that people out of one country neighborhood often use the same town hotel, and would think it rather an unfitting thing to go to any other. It happened that Mark met in the Jermyn Street house two county youngsters with whom he had acquaintance at Overhill, and in his own bright, open-hearted way he fell talking about his cousin Tom. Of course all the county knew of the quarrel between father and son, and there was no breach of family confidence in speaking of it.

"He's as obstinate," said Mark, good-humoredly, "as a donkey, and he won't even ask his governor to come round. He's going the pace, too, up here, I can tell you. He's thundering clever fellow, mind you, and you should go and hear that opera of his—the music's magnificent. But," continued Mark, with the laugh of a man who makes allowances, "he has kicked over the traces fairly now, and everybody who knows his game is a little sorry for it. They say Byron kept a harem, but it wasn't in

London, and he didn't hire a stage to show his beautiful Circassians to the British public. Of course, that sort of thing is no man's business but his own, but I'm very sorry for it. Don't you fellows breathe a word of this down at home. You won't, will you? It would ruin him with the old fellow for ever and ever."

Of course, the young men promised the most profound discretion.

"He got *me* into a bit of a mess a night or two ago," said Mark, laughing genially. "There's an Italian fellow, a tenor at the opera—Tom's a good deal mixed up with the opera people—and this fellow's wife took a fancy to Tom, and made a dead set at him. She's singing in 'Godiva' now, and has run away from her husband and attached herself to my charming cousin's fortunes. It's a bit awkward for me, for the operatic tenor had me pointed out as the man, and came at me with a thick stick. I don't suppose that Tom took any share in that business. He wouldn't let another fellow into a scrape of that kind knowingly. But if Tom's wild-oat harvest answers to his sowing, I can prophesy a devil of a crop for him. Now, for Heaven's sake, don't you fellows speak a word of this at home. I know I can trust your honor, or I wouldn't have spoken."

They promised faithfully, and went away to trust other people's honor, as Mark knew they would.

CHAPTER XIX.

Malfi did not call upon Baretti on the morrow. Perhaps he thought little of his countryman's promise of vengeance, and perhaps he was somewhat ashamed of his own ignominious bluster. But when he did call, the artist had something to say which interested him. Mark Carroll was a very clever young man, beyond a doubt, but even he was unable to count beforehand upon everything. He had naturally counted on the story reaching Lording's ears in one form or another, but he had not counted on the mode of Lording's reception of it. It set the old boy off as a spark starts a rocket, and he went at Tom to know the truth or falsehood of it, without an hour's delay. He found him in a dressing-gown, with a cigar in his mouth, a glass of

brandy and soda on the table before him, and a disorderly litter of musical manuscripts all about the room. Now Lording could not tell of his own intuition that Tom had been at work all night, and the lad's worn aspect and the brandy and soda taken in conjunction looked bad to the old fellow's eyes.

Tom held out his hand, but, to his consternation, Lording declined to take it, and set himself firmly upon the hearth-rug, with his hat in one hand, and his walking-stick in the other.

"Tom Carroll," said the old boy, "I never do anything by halves, and I won't shake hands by halves. I won't condemn you unheard, and you shall have your say fairly and fully. What's the meaning of these scandals about you and the women at your theater?"

"What scandals, sir?" asked Tom.

"All sorts of scandals, sir," cried Lording. "Do you mean to say you don't know of them?"

"I have never heard of any," Tom returned.

"By gad, sir," said Lording, "they say the place is a harem, and that you're the Sultan of it. Orgies! I don't know what all."

"Who says so?" asked Tom, beginning to look dangerous.

"It's a matter of general talk," said Lording. "The county's ringing with it."

The youngster heaved a great sigh and threw his hands abroad.

"So far as I know," he replied, "the house is as orderly as any in London. I believe it is."

His momentary anger faded. He was out of spirits, and broken with overwork and anxieties and continuous heartache, and he scarcely cared just then for anything.

"You believe it is?" said Lording, half in grief and half in rage. "I don't want an answer like that. What do you know about this? Come, Tom, my lad, I've loved you like a son, and we stand in such a position that I've a right to ask you."

"The whole thing is a wicked invention," Tom answered drearily. "Though why anybody should go about to invent a story of that sort against me, I can't guess."

"Nor I either," said Lording. "Tom, you must let

me get to the bottom of this. I must be able to contradict it, and I must be able to trace it to its source."

"Will you pursue your inquiries unhampered by me, sir?" asked Tom. "Will you make inquiries at the theater, or cause inquiries to be made? I am a little tired of being suspected and lied about and disbelieved. By Heaven!" he cried, suddenly, "I would be ashamed to ask a man of the truth or falsehood of a lie so palpable if I had known him a hundredth part as well as you know me."

"Tom," said Lording, "I am not to blame. I have a duty to perform—and so have you, for that matter. If these shameless charges are made against you, you must fight them. People are putting two and two together. They say your father had fuller reasons for throwing you over than were ever given to anybody."

"My father behaved to me, sir," said Tom, bitterly, "as no father had a right to behave to a son. All the rights are not on the father's side, and all the duties on the son's. If people are saying that, it is his business to contradict it, not mine."

"Yes, yes, Tom," said Lording, "your business as well as his. You must avoid the appearance of evil."

"Into what appearance of evil have I fallen?" Tom demanded.

"My lad," said Lording, who exercised wonderful patience, all things considered, "you fall into a terrible appearance of evil if you refuse to contradict things like these."

"They will die of themselves," said Tom. "I shall never die of them."

"Well," said Lording, with something of an effort, "you'll tell me on your honor that there isn't one word of truth in this scandal, and I'll believe you against the world."

"Thank you," said Tom. "On my honor as a gentleman, there is not one word of truth in it."

"Very well," said Lording, "the libel's done with—dead so far as I'm concerned. Now, who invented it? Who set it going? Is there anybody who has a grudge against you?"

Tom shook his head. "Not a soul I know of."

"You made a mistake before in refusing to defend yourself," said Lording, who was doing his hardest to be

loyal. "You must track this down, Tom. You must hunt it down. You must clear yourself. And until you've done that, Tom—I don't feel happy in saying it, my lad—but until you've done it, I think you'd better not—"

"I understand you," said Tom, not without a little bitterness.

"Don't think me harsh or unfriendly, Tom," said Lording, taking up the walking-stick and hat which he had only just laid down. "I can't help it. I'm very sorry indeed, very sorry."

"You have your duty to do, sir," said the youngster, as manfully as he could.

"And you have yours," returned Lording. "Track the scandal down."

In the natural bitterness of his heart, Tom made a rejoinder for which he was sorry many a time afterward.

"I have opportunities," he said. "My friends give me plenty of elbow-room."

"Tom Carroll," said the old boy, with a paler face, "you have no right to say that sort of thing to me. I'm not the man to charge with giving a friend elbow-room when he's in trouble. I have accepted your word, and I believe this thing to be an abominable scandal. But it lies on you to clear yourself. All the help I can give you, you shall have, but I can't have a stain brought into the house my daughter lives in. Clear yourself. You can do it."

"How?" asked Tom, with unwonted passion. "Where am I to bring my charge? Give me the name of the man who told you the story."

"The story's in the air," said Lording. "It's at every club in London more or less. There's scarcely a house in which it isn't talked about."

"And I am to fight this impalpable libel? Not I!" he cried, in a heat of anger and dispute. "I will tell you this, sir—there never was a man against whom this shameful charge would have been less true. You tell me you believe my word, but you don't believe me. You ask me to defend myself. I will defend myself when I am charged, but not before. How *can* I defend myself against the blackguards who throw the mud of their own hearts at me in the dark? Defense! What defense has a man in such a case, except in his contempt of his assailants?"

The speech was a little incoherent, but then righteous anger is just as likely to be incoherent as unrighteous anger, and when Tom let himself loose he began to feel well-nigh mad with rage and grief. That he of all men should be charged with wallowing in that hog-pen of sensual nastiness! The thought half-choked him. One cruel and false estimate of him had robbed him of his love, and now a lie as wicked as ever was coined was circulating from hand to hand with his figure stamped on it as a beast's, to make him odious in all good men's eyes.

"If you have any pretensions to my daughter's hand," said Lording, "your own hands must be clean. And they must not only be clean, but men must know that they are clean. You can go out and track the story if you like. Almost anybody will tell it to you, or a part of it. I'm only just and fair to my own child—not cruel or unreasonable with you. Before you come to us again set yourself straight about this matter."

"We had better say 'Good-bye' at once, sir," Tom answered. "There can be no service in delay."

"Very well," said the old fellow, sorrowfully. He had no doubt that Tom was maligned, or he tried to believe that he had none, and he was grieved to the heart at the whole business. But his soul revolted at the thought of Mary's name being coupled with such a story, and he could do no other than he had done. "Clear yourself and come to me again," he said at the door, "and you'll find me what I've always been."

"Thank you," said Tom, coldly.

"Tom" said Lording, turning for a last effort, "this lofty way of yours brought about the quarrel with your father. People who know you will accept your word, perhaps, but your friends have a right to ask more of you than a bare denial. You haven't the right to grieve us all in this way." He paused, but received no answer. "Think it over, my lad," said Lording, in a voice which began to be untrustworthy, "and you'll see things as I do. Good-bye, my lad. There's no malice or disbelief in my mind, but I can't help myself. Good-bye, Tom."

"Good-day, sir," said Tom, as coldly as before, and Lording with a wistful look went out.

Tom sat down at the table and began to push about the disorderly manuscripts upon it, but he could not distin-

guish one sheet from another, and in a while he rose and walked with irregular and disordered steps about the room. The tears of rage and shame and misery were hot in his eyes, but he fought them back and would not yield to them.

Whilst he was still in this unhappy state, Baretti came down in his velvet sack, and his gay cap and slippers. His face beamed, and he entered the room with a fantastic step.

"Carroll," he began, "I have an inspiration. It is on canvas already. Come and look at it." Then he caught sight of Tom's wild face and ran toward him, "What is the matter? You are ill? What is it? Sit down, Carroll, sit down."

"Damn the whole base world!" cried Tom, flinging himself out of Baretti's hands. "Curse the foul-hearted, foul-mouthed hounds that fill it!"

"Carroll," cried the painter, "what is it?" He had never seen his friend enraged before, and the youngster's aspect, commonly so bland and gentle, was frightfully altered now. His voice was hoarse with passion, his face was deadly pale and hard, and his eyes glared like a madman's. He was nearer the boundary line between madness and sanity at that moment than any man can go with safety. He felt it, and trembled for himself, and the tremor saved him. He leashed himself by one tremendous effort, and sat down in a quiet more terrible than his momentary violence. Baretti, alarmed by his aspect and the wildness of his words, and fearing to disturb him anew, kept silence for a time. Then he ventured once more to lay a hand upon his friend's shoulder, and said once more, in a voice as gentle as a woman's, "Carroll—my friend—dearest of my friends—what is it?"

Tom dropped his face into his hands, and a scalding tear or two had way in spite of him. He looked up with the moisture still glistening in his wild eyes.

"Go now, Baretti," he said, with a great effort. "Come in half an hour. I can't talk now." He waved Baretti away with a gesture of such mingled entreaty and command that the painter lingeringly retired, and went slowly up the stairs to his own room. Tom could hear him pacing to and fro, and, sore and bitter as he was, he found some comfort in his friend's nearness, and the certainty of his sympathy. In a minute or two at the most he began

to recover his lost mastery of himself, and having bathed and dressed, he sat down to await Baretti. When the little man came he saw the change of his friend's appearance and augured well of it, and Tom justified the augury, for he broke down no more, but told the story of Lording's visit with a calm almost judicial. Baretti, indeed, displayed the more emotion of the two, though he was careful —in the memory of Tom's late outbreak—to repress himself for his friend's sake.

There was a struggle in Baretti's heart the rage of which would not be easy to exaggerate in words. For if gratitude were a passion with him, his love for his friend's sweetheart none the less fought for unrivaled domination, and the hopes and joys that sprung up anew within him at this story were terrible in the fierce light of his own scorn and hatred of them, and the passion of his self-contempt. The manhood in him won the day, as it had done before, but the conflict left him stricken and hysterical.

"My cousin Mark," said Tom, when he had told the story, "gave me an inkling of some such charge against me."

"Your cousin Mark," said Baretti, with curious quiet, "is a very astute person, and he plays his game well."

"What does this mean?" inquired Tom.

"It means," said Baretti, "that I suspect your cousin Mark to be the man who sets this story afoot. Listen, Carroll. Whose turn will this tale serve? Your cousin Mark's! Who is the one man in all the world who finds it to his interest to throw a cloud about your character? Your cousin Mark! Now listen. Speak if you like when I have done. Is it a common characteristic of mankind to be so self-sacrificing as to throw over a fortune like your father's for a scruple of honor? Would not most men throw over the scruple for the fortune? And has not this fine Cousin Mark of yours protested a little overmuch? And did you ever know him as a self-sacrificing man?"

"He never had a chance to be," said Tom, "he was always hard-up, poor Mark. You're wrong, Baretti. Mark's too open for such a dastardly course as that, but he always pretended to be a cynic, and some people believed him."

"I have reason for distrusting him," said Baretti. "He was trying to make a stalking horse of you in that affair of

Malfi's. You believe his innocence in that? I know him to be guilty. Signora Malfi confessed her perfidy to her husband, and defied him."

"He was not her husband," said Tom.

"Of that I know nothing," said Baretti, coolly. "And it is not material to the case. My argument is that he proclaimed his innocence to you, and that he was guilty, and that he used you and meant to use you as a screen. And I maintain that a man of whom that is true will stop at nothing. What? He abused your confidence and friendship to profit by them in an intrigue, and he will not abuse them to gain a fortune? Carroll, the truth is as plain as the sun that shines in heaven. You told me that you found him locked in with Bethesda at the theater"—Baretti was willing to take anything to throw at Mark—"what did that mean?"

Tom, on the other side, was willing to attack the weaker portions of Baretti's argument, and to leave the stronger parts untouched. A boar or tiger will charge at anything when wounded, but a gentleman is another sort of animal, and he was no more disposed to be suspicious of his cousin Mark now than he would have been if this base libel had never hurt him.

"It meant nothing," he answered. "They locked the door because the ordinary latch didn't act. That was all." These side suspicions weakened Baretti's case instead of strengthening it. It is always a good rule in criminal proceedings to charge no more than you can prove.

At this instant their talk found an unexpected diversion. They had already heard a ring at the front door, but had scarcely noticed it, and now, with a hurried knock, and no waiting for a response, in burst Lording, with a red face and panting breath, waving a newspaper in his hand.

"Have you told Mr. Baretti about this matter?" he asked. Tom nodded a surprised assent. "Then I can speak at once. You asked me just now what you were to fight. Fight that." And he flung the newspaper on the table. "It's a low rag, I know, but you can wipe your hands on it as well as if it were the 'Times' itself."

Tom took up the journal and looked at it. He knew it at a glance, for its name was commonly cried by hawkers about the streets, and he had heard it spoken of once or twice at the clubs and elsewhere as a sort of journalistic

sewer. Civilization amongst other curious matters has given us this particular joy. The liberty of the press is a glorious thing, and with a great price bought our ancestors this freedom, but in this mixed world no blessing is unmixed. You may buy nowadays the pure milk of the word, or, "turkey stuffed with truffles gay," if the dish suit you, and you may have either served in gold and silver, but the human porker likes his cabbage-stalk served in a gutter, and he gets it seasoned to taste.

There was no difficulty in finding the paragraph Lording had come to show, for the old boy had marked it round with a quill pen in something of a triumphant rage, if the look of the heavy lines could be trusted. Tom read it with a sense of rising indignation and disgust. It was written with a high pretense of moral tone, and that was only natural, for the British porker, unlike his French brother, prefers an almost religious seasoning with his garbage. A moral tone can make even cabbage-stalks respectable, and they eat the better for respectability, delicious as they are without it.

"You'll fight that?" asked Lording, still breathing hard with haste.

"Yes," said Tom, with a pugnacious look which was strange to him. "I think I'll fight it. I am much obliged to you for bringing it."

"This brings the thing to a head, you see," said Lording, "and I'm glad I chanced upon it."

"So am I," said Tom. "Heartily glad."

"You'd better come to my lawyer," said Lording. "This isn't in his line, but he'll tell us the best man to go to, and we must begin at once."

They walked out and took a cab together, leaving Baretti at home. In less than half an hour they were closeted together with a shrewd criminal lawyer, and in ten minutes he knew as much of the case as he wanted to know at that stage.

"We prove publication to begin with," said the lawyer, "and will do that at once." He rang his bell. "Go to that address, Mr. Wilder, and bring a copy of 'The Way of the World.' You may point out this paragraph, and may say that a libel suit will be based upon it."

The clerk retired, and with another word or two the lawyer bowed out his visitors, and was deep in a fresh case in

five minutes. Lording, having begun to fight on Tom's side, was disposed to go with him heart and soul, but there was one thing on his mind which weighed against the youngster. He spoke of it at last, though with reluctance.

"Tom," he said, as they walked toward Montague Gardens together, "I want to ask a question. I passed by the Garrick Theater the other morning—it's a week or two ago now—and I saw a young woman hanging on to you in the street at the main entrance. I didn't like the look of it, and it made me readier to receive these stories than I should have been if I hadn't seen it. Now tell me, what was it?"

"I would rather not tell you yet," said Tom, to Lording's indignation, but the old boy's feelings were a little calmed by what follows. "She is singing at the Garrick, and her name is Signora Malfi. If you will ask Baretti about her, he can tell you something, and I will fill in the rest."

Mark's scheme, ably as it had been built up, began to look shaky. Baretti told his story in answer to Lording's inquiry, and did more. He let loose his suspicions of Mark Carroll, and a seed or two of them fell in Lording's mind and took growth there. It was not easy for an open and generous nature like Lording's to give nutriment to a belief in a villainy so shameless in any man he had familiarly known. He struggled against his conviction, if but feebly.

"No, no, Mr. Baretti, Mark isn't so bad as that. He *wanted* to put Tom straight with his father. He begged me to go down to him at once and mediate with him. I went down," said Lording, rubbing his head with a rueful look, "and like an old fool, I had a row with him, and made things worse than ever."

"Mr. Mark Carroll is a very astute young man indeed," said Baretti, with a smile which was not altogether pretty to look at.

"Why," cried Lording, glaring at him, "do you think he sent me down on purpose to have a row with his uncle?"

"Mr. Carroll," said the painter, "is the last man in the world with whose domestic concerns I should be inclined to meddle. His son and his friend will forgive me if I say that Mr. Carroll's sense of his own dignity is a little exaggerated. Mr. Lording will forgive me if I say that

his own warm temper and impetuous good-heartedness make him the last man in the world to send to Mr. Carroll on such a message at such a moment. And Mr. Mark may or may not forgive me if I say that he reckoned on that, and played his game with the cunning I gave him credit for."

"Pooh!" said Lording, feebly; but he was evidently confounded by Baretti's suspicion, and had no heart to fight against it.

"Mr. Mark Carroll's anxiety to be rid of his uncle's fortune is a little too pressing to my mind," said the painter. Everybody knows how easy it is to believe a thing by mere dint of talking about it, and by this time Baretti was confident of the truth of his suspicions, and saw the ground more and more plainly at his feet, and felt his steps more certain every minute. Lording began to share his doubts, and even Tom's belief in Mark was somewhat shaken.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Lording at last. "I'll go and see Mark, and have a talk with him about it."

"And get angry with him in five minutes," said Baretti, with a laugh, to make the thing less biting, "and tell him the truth about himself, and put him on his guard. Forgive me, Mr. Lording. Let me go."

"I *am* a little hot-tempered, I'm afraid," said Lording, sorrowfully. "I fly out at things. I'm not fit to meddle with these matters, but if I promise that I'll hold my tongue will you take me with you, and let me judge him for myself?"

Baretti could scarcely refuse this, and in effect they set out for Mark's hotel, and found the young man there in a state of warm indignation at the libelous paragraph, which had been put into his hand by a friend.

"Tom will prosecute for libel?" he asked.

"He has taken proceedings already," said Baretti.

"Right!" cried Mark warmly. "I wish I were free to act for him, but my fear of losing my influence over his father ties my hands, and I can't do it. Will he institute a criminal prosecution, or go for damages? It's not of much use to go for damages, though, against a rag like that," scornfully indicating the journal, which lay upon the table of his room.

Lording looked at Baretti meaningly. Everything

seemed open and above-board about Mark. It was scarcely believable that a man could speak as he did and not mean it.

"How does Tom take it?" Mark asked. "I was going up to see him when you called. I leave town to-morrow, and he ought to be assured at once of the confidence and sympathy of all his friends. There ought to be a cat-o'-nine-tails for that sort of fellow;" waving his hand again toward the journal. There was some truth in Mark's anger at the newspaper. The libelous paragraph gave Tom a chance to come forward with a contradiction so complete that it might excite even his father's sympathy for the undeserved shames he had endured. "The filthy scandal-mongers!" cried Mark aloud, with an air of rage. "The hobbling idiots!" he added inwardly. "How could I reckon on their stepping in to spoil my game?"

"Well," said Lording, when Mark had run upstairs to his bedroom for hat and gloves, "what do you think of him? Doesn't he look honest enough?"

"He plays well," said Baretti. "Wait and see."

CHAPTER XX.

THE preliminary proceedings made Tom Carroll famous. They did more. They filled the Garrick Theater night after night with an audience eager to see the ladies who were the subject of so engaging a scandal. If the lessee's arrangements had been less extravagantly made, "Godiva" might have been worth money to him; but as things were, the inevitable, unavoidable loss went on, delayed or hastened by fluctuations, but continuous. Tom and Baretti had talked the thing thoroughly over, and had come to the conclusion that to attempt to lessen the expenses by discharging the famous artists who performed in the opera and engaging less famous and less able singers in their place would be suicidal. To spend now and to go on spending in reason so long as the public cared to fill the house seemed wise to both of them, because Tom would have it that all the money thus thrown broadcast was seed for the future, and Baretti was kept in ignorance of the amount of his resources.

"I have my mother's fortune," Tom would say, with-

out a thought of deceiving Baretti as to its magnitude. The painter never guessed how slender his friend's resources were growing.

"Godiva" had already achieved a success large enough to impose upon the ignorant public; but those who were behind the scenes, all theatrical critics, actors and singers, and professional musicians all over London, managers, theatrical agents, and publishers of music, were perfectly aware of the truth. The truth did nobody any harm, as they supposed Tom Carroll to be a man of great wealth, and some of them thought of a fool and his money, and the rapid partition which is said to be effected between them.

Tom would willingly have stopped the work and closed the theater long before the great libel case came on, but he felt how disastrous a step that might be to him. He could foresee the construction the other side would put upon it, and in fancy he could see an eminent pleader of name unknown pounding a police-court table, and informing the court that the alleged libel had had the effect of closing a house in which such infamy was practiced—that the witnesses had been purposely scattered by the complainant to prevent prejudice to his own case—that it was easily to be proved, and would be proved before that charge was disposed of, that the receipts at the house had never been higher than they were at the time at which the doors of the house were closed—and so forth and so forth. And so "Godiva" ran, and the law's delays kept the libel case hanging on, and the great gulf of poverty came nearer and nearer, and no man guessed it, except the man who was plunging into it, and who saw no way to avoid it.

The fame Tom Carroll got out of the proceedings in the libel case was not the sort after which he thirsted, and when the actual trial of the case came on he was subjected to great unpleasantness. Bowder, Q.C., was engaged for the other side, and made it extremely unpleasant for the complainant.

"Now, Mr. Carroll," said Bowder, Q.C., hitching his gown at him when he got him in the box, "I believe you are a man of spotless moral character."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, who was cooler than he expected to be.

"Pray don't accept that as my conclusion, Mr. Car-

roll," said Bowder, who could be facetious, "I may entertain a different opinion."

Now this seemed a little unwarrantably insolent, and Tom let out a facer in return.

"Naturally," he said. "You are paid to entertain a different opinion."

"I will leave you, sir," said the notable criminal barrister, with an air of injured dignity, "I will leave you, sir, to reflect upon the good taste of that observation at your leisure. But now, Mr. Carroll, the stand-point you take is that you come into court to prefer this charge as a man of spotless moral character? Come. That is so, I fancy?"

"The stand-point I take is that the article complained of is false and scandalous," said Tom.

"And that you are a man of spotless moral character?"

"That is a claim few men might care to prefer," said Tom.

"You don't care to put it forward in your own case?" asked Bowder, Q.C.

"Do you?" returned the complainant.

The case was interesting, and the court was full. There were two or three barristers present who had nothing on their hands, and who knew Mr. Bowder and his ways. The defendant's counter-query tickled these gentlemen so that they led the court on to laughter, and for half a second the notable barrister was disconcerted. But this game of fence was old to him, and he knew better than to lose his temper.

"You mistake the situation, Mr. Carroll," he said, with suave humor. "It is you who are under cross-examination, and not I. Perhaps we may be allowed to put the matter in this way: Without actually being a man of spotless moral character, you like it to be thought so?"

"Kindly proceed to your examination, if you please," answered the complainant. "You can't mend a bad case by intellectual horse-play."

"You remind me of my duty to my clients," said Bowder, still suavely humorous, though a certain wickedness underlay the suavity. "I am obliged to you. Did you ever stand in the dock of a police-court, Mr. Carroll?"

"Never."

"Upon your oath?"

"Upon my oath."

Hr. Bowder's attendant satellite pulled him by the gown, and whispered. Bowder stopped to listen, and rose smiling.

"At least, Mr. Carroll, you have been in the hands of the police?"

"I have," said Tom, quietly.

"And this is not your first appearance in a court of justice?"

"No."

"I think you did not make the other appearance to which I allude as a witness, but as a prisoner?"

"I appeared as the defendant in a case of assault."

"Don't you think you might have been a little more ingenuous at first, Mr. Carroll?" asked the able Bowder. "You did not appear in the dock? Where did you appear?"

"I had a seat in the body of the court," Tom answered, feeling anything but comfortable. The apparent quibble on his answer troubled him. "Perhaps the court will allow me to explain. I have no desire to evade this examination. A categorical question was put to me, and I answered it; but I have no wish to fence about trifles."

"You think a charge of wanton and provoked assault a trifle, Mr. Carroll?" asked Bowder. No man at the bar (and this is one of the blots upon our legal system which can scarcely be scraped away) is expected to be fair to an adverse witness.

"Permit me," said the complainant, "to throw myself upon your merciful consideration." This he said satirically, and it was well enough, but before it was fairly spoken he lost his temper for a second or two, and added, "I neither said nor mean that, sir, and you know it." He was not accustomed to be badgered in this way, and it cost him all he knew to restrain his anger.

This anger gave him no advantage, and, recognizing that fact, he prepared to control himself anew.

"Very well, Mr. Carroll," said the barrister, jauntily. "We will come to matters of fact. You have been in the hands of the police, and you have appeared before a magistrate. Was the charge against you dismissed?"

"It was held to be proved," Tom answered, "and I was fined twenty pounds."

"I am obliged to you for your candor, Mr. Carroll," said the Q.C., benevolently malicious. "You were fined twenty pounds. And do you read the newspapers?"

"Occasionally," Tom answered, seeing what was coming.

"Are you acquainted with a publication called 'The Mirror'?"

"I know that there is such a journal."

"You know there is such a journal. Now, since you are in a candid mood for the moment, you may, perhaps, admit that you saw an article in that journal relating to yourself. I can assist you if your memory fails you. It appeared on the day following your appearance at the police-court. Did you see it?"

"I saw it."

"I believe it spoke of your rowdy and disgraceful conduct?"

"It condemned me in the strongest terms. I can not call its terms to mind."

"It condemned you in the strongest terms. Thank you. Do you happen to remember that it spoke of the leniency of the Bench as having probably been distorted by your wealth and social position?"

"I remember that."

"And that it expressed very strongly an opinion that your offense would more fittingly have been punished by imprisonment than by fine?"

"I remember that also."

"I presume, Mr. Carroll, that you expected these questions?"

"I expected them. Certainly."

"And that the prospect did not encourage you to pose as a man of spotless moral character?"

Cold silence.

"Well, Mr. Carroll," pursued the practiced tormentor, "that is a point upon which you are naturally sensitive, and upon which I will not press you." The people in the court thought this amusing and laughed at it. "But now, sir, will you be so obliging as to tell us what domestic event followed upon your appearance at the police-court?"

"Be more explicit, if you please."

"I believe you maintain your innocence of that charge of which we have just spoken."

"Emphatically."

"Do your friends accept your disclaimer? Is it or is it not a fact that your father instantly cast you off, and that he still refuses to speak to you?"

"It is true that I am not on terms of friendship with my father."

"And is it true that the breach arose out of your rowdy and disgraceful conduct?"

"That is certainly untrue."

"That it arose out of the assault and battery upon the person of Mr. Moss?"

"It arose, chiefly, as I believe," Tom answered, "from my father's anger at the publicity that case had received."

"Did he decline to receive your account of the case?"

"Unhappily, he did."

"I can sympathize with your regret," said Bowder, and this time the laughter was hearty. It was not the fault of the laughers that they could not know how lofty and tender was the nature which was thus wrung and tortured. "Now, I will ask you another question, if you please, Mr. Carroll. I see by the public advertisements that Mr. Bethesda is the nominal lessee of the Garrick Theater. Who is the real lessee?"

"I am the actual lessee."

"And Mr. Bethesda, persistently announced as the lessee, 'the sole lessee,' never was the lessee at all?"

"Quite so."

"Does a representation of that sort fit with your notions of spotless honor, Mr. Carroll?"

"It is a common practice," Tom answered.

"And a most convenient one, no doubt," said Bowder, in a sort of virtuous triumph over vice exposed. "I will not detain you much longer, sir. The taking of the theater was a purely commercial speculation?"

"Not purely commercial."

"Not purely commercial?" cried Bowder. "You have been kind enough to admit so much that by and by you may oblige us by admitting everything. What other element—"

"I took the Garrick Theater chiefly for the purpose of laying my own work before the public."

"And as a commercial speculation?"

"And," Tom answered, "as a commercial speculation."

"Now, will you be good enough to tell us whether it has ever succeeded as a commercial speculation?"

"It has not succeeded."

"Have you or have you not lost money from the first?"

"I have lost money from the first."

"Is it or is it not a fact within your knowledge that the house will not hold enough to pay the working expenses?"

"That fact was brought to my knowledge shortly after the opening of the theater."

"And you held on to your precious commercial speculation?"

"I had reasons for continuing it."

"We shall get at them by and by," said Bowder.

Then followed a long series of questions about Miss This and Miss That, to every one of which Tom could give a direct and honest negative. Beat about as he would, Bowder could fasten no admission on him here, but the young fellow already stood dangerously prejudiced. The judge knew how to estimate a good deal of what had gone on already; but the jury and some of the listeners thought the nominal lesseeship of Bethesda and the reckless financing of the house looked as black against the complainant as his admission about the assault and the "Mirror."

But many of the performers in "Godiva" were people of repute; and they came up one after another to give a blank denial to the allegations of the libel. Nothing Bowder Q.C., could do could shake these witnesses, and to any candid mind it was as clear as day that the morality of the Garrick was a little higher than that of most theaters, instead of being a great deal lower. In his address to the jury, Bowder, Q.C., was very crushing with the complainant. "You saw, gentlemen, how he shuffled and squinted and prevaricated in that box before you." Bowder was so indignant at this that the jury really thought they had seen it, and shared the eminent pleader's indignation at it. Then the great man was mightily sarcastic over the commercial speculation, and having already dragged the real figures out of Bethesda, he demanded to know if any man in whom there dwelt one scintilla of intelligence was asked to believe that there was not some sinister purpose behind a profusion so prodigal as that of the com-

plainant. But he was at his best in dealing with the assault case. Here he rose to heights of moral indignation so sublime, and drew pictures of the wreck of domestic hopes in the Carroll family so touching that the jury were ready to acquit the defendants on the spot. The judge set all this right, however, as he generally can do, and the intelligent dozen of men gradually sobered under the judicial shower of fact and reason. On the evening of the third day of the trial they retired, and, after considering for some half hour, brought in a verdict of Guilty against the editor and publisher. The judge, with a necessary word or two about the liberty of the Press and the sanctity of private characters, sentenced the pair to twelve months apiece, and the great libel case was at an end, and Tom Carroll's character had had the black so rubbed into it that nothing could get it altogether clear again. People knew very well that where there is smoke there is fire, and very few thought Tom well out of the case.

It is an old aphorism that you have only to throw plenty of mud to make sure of it sticking, and a good deal of the mud which had been thrown at Tom seemed still to the public eye to hold fast to him below his legal whitewashing. The case came as a sort of godsend to the newspapers, which happened otherwise to be dull that week, and it was reported at great length, a special staff being employed by each of the leading journals. There was not a man in England whose affairs were more relentlessly canvassed whilst the trial lasted and for a few days afterward.

Now all this was gall and wormwood to Mary Lording, who heard a great deal more about it than Tom himself. Ladies found a curious fascination in the case, and spoke with a shuddering joy of that horrid Mr. Carroll, whom they had used to think so nice and who had turned out to be so very, very dreadful. Some spoke in ignorance, and some in spite, and some in condolence, and the girl bore it since it had to be borne. She refused absolutely and entirely to believe one word of evil against the man she had known from his boyhood and her own infancy, and had never known anything but a gentleman. She scorned and hated the calumnies which surrounded him, and she scorned and hated those who believed in them. She was not Tom's lover, but she was his honest friend and stanch partisan. And she would have been his lover too, with all these

troubles behind him to push him into her arms, if it had not been for her own heart's memories of Baretti.

As for Tom, his position was extremely difficult. He was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the promises he had made to himself were unfulfilled. He felt himself soiled by the infamies which had been brought so near him, and, innocent as he was, he felt vile in his own eyes when he thought of Mary. How could a pure-minded woman bear to think of associating herself for life with a man who had been the center of such a story?

This sort of exaggerated fineness of sentiment, as everybody knows, can have the edge taken off it by close and constant intercourse, but Tom stayed away from Lording's house, and gave himself no chance. His growing poverty gave him a more genuine reason for absence than his morbid delicacy provided, and everything he had to do at this time seemed to proclaim him a failure.

When the trial was over the last reason for keeping up the run of the opera at the Garrick had disappeared. The people knew he was a failure, and that he had thrown away five or six thousand pounds in the attempt to make himself look like a success.

"Advertise the last six nights, Bethesda," he said to his manager.

"There are no arrangements for anything to follow?" asked Bethesda, half questioningly.

"No," said Tom. "I think I have had about enough of theatrical enterprise. Do you think we can relet the house?"

"I should say there is every chance of it," said Bethesda. "Every chance."

"Very well," said Tom. "Send out the posters, 'Last six nights of the enormous musical failure, "Godiva."' I shall be glad to have done with it."

Mr. Bethesda, looking after the retreating figure of his patron, smiled humility and benevolence.

"He can afford it, poor young gentleman," said Mr. Bethesda, inwardly. "It's a pity, but the blow is not likely to prove fatal to him. I have not done badly in his company, though I expected to do better. A young gentleman with a good deal of money and no knowledge of business is sometimes a very awkward sort of customer to deal with, but Mr. Carroll has been a pearl among employers."

Since Tom would not call on Lording, the old fellow called on Tom, without any decided idea of what he meant to say to him. He began to talk about the finish of the trial, and after expressing his exultation at the punishment which had been inflicted upon the libelers, he found Tom so irresponsive that it was difficult to go on.

"Tom," said the old boy, suddenly, "treat me fairly. Tell me about your plans. What are you going to do?"

"I shall do as best I can, sir," Tom answered. "I can make a living, I dare say."

"Make a living?" cried Lording, savagely. "Why the devil don't you behave like a sensible fellow?"

Tom knew what his companion meant, but he returned no answer. He was all but bankrupt, and the whole world knew of the failure which had so long been bolstered up by money, and blazoned as a success in all the journals. And though he had gained his case against the scandal which had assailed him, he knew very well that there were scores of people who thought him soiled by it. It was in Lording's mind that Tom ought somehow to be penitent and ashamed of himself, and generally docile, and, in fact, the two men were, in a word, at once depressed and irritable.

"I am not going to throw myself at the head of any man who doesn't want me," said Lording. "I've stuck by you all the time, and I'd stick by you now if you'd let me. But since you won't, I'm going. When you come to your senses, I shall be glad to see you."

"Very well, sir," said Tom, sadly and bitterly. There was no open quarrel, for there was no ground for an open quarrel between them, but Lording rose and went his way. It was not his fault, he told himself. He was not the man to desert another in extremity. But he could go no further than he had gone, and it was shameful to keep on throwing his daughter at the head of a man who would not take her. But he was not happy, and he felt as if, after all, he had acted shabbily. This is not a sentiment calculated to improve the temper, and by the time he reached home he was in a state of hot wrath against himself and Tom. Mary saw his disturbance and asked its cause.

"I've been trying to bring that young fool to reason," he said, rather unfairly. "He's like a bear with a sore head. I can't get a word out of him, and I'm not going

to fling my child at the head of any man who doesn't choose to take her."

"Papa," said the girl, bending over him and caressing him, "remember how tried he has been and how unfortunate."

She felt that she, at least, should be true to him in spite of everything, and she went away to write a hopeful letter to him. If only it had been possible to make him happy without marrying him! She tried to write the hopeful letter, and the words that came to her pen were on one sheet so icy and on another so overwarm that she could make nothing of the task, and after a dozen efforts gave it up. If she could have written, "I love you, and if you leave me you will break my heart," the whole thing would naturally have ended and determined then and there. But she could not write it truly, and she could not bring herself to feign it. And all the time her heart was more with Baretti than with Tom, and she had her own unhappiness, and the best of human hearts are selfish in misery.

The letter went unwritten. She would leave it to events to untangle themselves.

CHAPTER XXI.

About a fortnight after the closing of the Garrick Theater Azubah Moore received an annoying statement from her teacher of singing. For the future his terms would be multiplied by eight.

"But surely," she said, "that is a very extraordinary increase."

"As a matter of fact," said the teacher, "it is not an increase at all. I ask for no more than I have always received—for no more than the payment of my ordinary terms."

She answered that she did not understand, and her look of bewilderment was too natural to be feigned.

"The difference," he said, "has hitherto been paid, but I can not reckon upon it any longer."

"Has been paid?" she asked, in angry amazement. "By whom?"

"By Mr. Carroll," returned the teacher.

"By Mr. Carroll?" she repeated. She could scarcely

be angry at that, for it was to him that she and her father and mother had consented to owe everything. In spite of the daily papers she was ignorant of the great libel case, and she knew nothing of Tom's losses, or of that family quarrel which had been public all the world over.

"By Mr. Carroll," said the teacher again. "I had supposed you knew of it, but it was no concern of mine. But now, Miss Moore, that Mr. Carroll is no longer in a position to keep up his share of the payments, I must ask for a revision of our contract, or—" He made a motion with his hands as if he tossed something away.

"Mr. Carroll is no longer in a position to pay you?" asked the girl. She was not thinking of herself at all. "What has happened?"

"I'm afraid," said the teacher, "that he is ruined. Haven't you seen the papers? Mr. Carroll has been a good deal before the public lately."

She could only answer, "Ruined!" The thing seemed incredible.

"I'm afraid so," said the teacher. "If you like, Miss Moore, to enter into an arrangement with me to make over a share of your professional earnings for the first two years, I shall think it worth while to superintend your studies without present payment, and even to devote to you some special care and attention. Otherwise I shall be compelled to ask for my ordinary terms."

She heard this, but had no understanding for it.

"Can you tell me," she asked, "how Mr. Carroll was ruined?"

"He seems to have lost a good deal of money on his theatrical enterprise, and to have quarreled with his father. I know no more about it, but he is said to be completely broken. Will you think over my proposal, Miss Moore, and give me your conclusions on it?"

"Will you write to me?" she answered. "I can not tell you what I may do."

He promised, and she left him and walked away, feeling quite dazed and staggered. She was but a girl, with a very limited knowledge of the world, and its chances of rise and fall. It seemed as amazing to be told that Mr. Carroll was ruined as it would be to the average citizen to learn for certain that the Prince of Wales was reduced to the shelter of the workhouse in his

native parish. He had always seemed so far above distress, so bright, so gay, so grand a seignor altogether, that he had been like the creature of another sphere to her. And now he "was said to be completely broken." What might that mean? Shabbily dressed, ill-shod, ill-lodged, ill-fed? Forlorn and sad-visaged, and in grief? She could picture him thus to herself, wild as the vision seemed.

She was country bred and a stanch walker, and now, having her usual musical hour to spare, she went home on foot, thinking all the way. Latterly, since her father's accident she had been accustomed to act and think for herself, and it was not in her mind as yet to tell anybody of the change in her own fortunes which Tom Carroll's fall had brought about. That indeed troubled her very little by comparison with his misfortunes. She was so full of him that when she reached home and found him sitting genial and unchanged in the shop, which he himself had provided as a resource for the family, she had scarcely the presence of mind to greet him with a mere good-day and a shake of the hand.

He was sitting at the counter talking to Mrs. Moore, with a glass of milk and one of the crisp little dairy loaves before him.

"What excellent bread you have, to be sure, Mrs. Moore," he said, smilingly, "and what charming country milk. You ought to do a great trade here."

"We're doing wonderful, thank God, sir," answered Mrs. Moore, in a flutter of pleasure. "And I don't think as if Moore only had his health, poor thing, sir, we should ever ha' been better off in our lives."

"I'm heartily glad to hear it," he answered, munching away at the bread and sipping at the milk. "Beautiful bread this is, to be sure. And what a sauce an appetite is, Mrs. Moore. I haven't had a meal of bread and milk since I was quite a baby."

"No, sir, I suppose not," said Mrs. Moore.

The girl stood by with her roll of music in her hands and watched him. Unchanged? No. That had seemed true in the first revulsion of reality from the dreadful fancies she had had of him, but now she could see the trace of trouble on his brow and in his eyes. He was very pale, too, and when he was silent a look of suffering would settle

upon his face. In a little while he arose and went away with a hearty shake hands for each of them.

"I can't stay until Moore awakes, Mrs. Moore, but you'll give my respects, and tell him I called, won't you?"

Azubah ran upstairs and watched him furtively from her own window as he went down the street swinging his cane in a fashion which looked gay and light-hearted enough if it had not been for her memory of those new lines upon his face and the look of trouble in his eyes. Whilst she watched him his cane ceased to swing, his gait changed, he seemed somehow to droop in his walk, and as he turned out of sight, the poise of his head and, indeed the attitude of his whole figure looked not only thoughtful but despondent.

Azubah was one of those who act upon impulse, and who analyze the impulse afterward or not at all. What impulse moved her when she ran down-stairs and followed Tom Carroll she would have been puzzled to say, then or afterward. It was certainly not curiosity. There was sympathy in it, but sympathy was not all. She had fluttered out into the streets, and, turning the corner Tom had turned before her, had caught sight of the retreating figure, before any questions of her own purpose arose in her mind. Then she awoke on a sudden to a shamefaced feeling of obtrusive impertinence, and retreated with both cheeks on fire, but not before she had observed anew the drooping melancholy gait into which Tom Carroll had fallen, a gait which expressed despondency and irresolution as plainly as the words on a printed page.

There are prodigious numbers of people in the world who have learned almost all they know of human nature from novels and the stage. In life a man is not under the necessity of making his emotions understood by the denizens of a distant gallery, and nature plays more subtly than art; so subtly that it is only one in a possible ten thousand of spectators who may guess at what this sign or that expresses. To walk four or five miles through daylight London is to be exposed to the glances of many thousands, and yet—unless you purposely publish them—to keep your own emotions secret. It is probable that nobody but Azubah saw more than a meditative slowness in Tom's walk that afternoon, but she read or seemed to read something very like despair in it.

She thought of him sadly that afternoon and evening. Nobody could tell into what depths of poverty she and her father and mother might have fallen if it had not been for his kindness, and now he himself was in distress. They could pay him back by and by what he had lent them, but she knew enough of their differing spheres to tell that the sum which had made her father and mother fairly prosperous would be of little service to him. There are country gentlemen in England richer than the owner of Trench House, but she had not been bred to think so, and she exaggerated Tom's fall because she exaggerated his former splendors. Yet they must strain every nerve to repay him now, little as it would be to him, and she herself owed him a private debt which she would be quit of in one way or another. The splendid, generous, kingly youngster, heir apparent to the throne of Overhill, the lightest-hearted, freest-handed, and most friendly among men, and now, "said to be completely broken." The girl's tender and unworldly heart filled with a dangerous pity.

She dreamed in her broken sleep that night that he was in rags and starving, and she brooded, unhappily, over the dream next day. And sitting next morning in the little room behind the shop, still brooding over an idle needle, she saw the object of her thoughts enter at the door-way, and being alone for the moment, she was forced to go in and meet him.

"Good morning, Miss Moore," he said, with something of an embarrassed air which she could read plainly enough, but was at a loss to account for. "I have business in this part of London just now, and I am becoming quite a frequent visitor. How is your father to-day?"

"He will be glad to see you," said Azubah. "Will you come in and see him?"

Tom assented, and the girl led the way. The old farmer with his wasted face and keen eyes sat in an arm-chair smoking.

"Go and look after the shop, Zubah," he said, when he and Tom had shaken hands. "Mr. Carroll will take care of me for a minute or two." The girl obeyed. "And so, Mr. Thomas," said Moore, when she had gone, "our Christian friend has cleared you out, has he?"

This query rather staggered the visitor, and for half a minute he returned no answer.

"It was my own fault entirely, Moore," he said at last. "If by our Christian friend you mean Bethesda—"

"I mean Bethesda," said Moore nodding.

"I think he acted very fairly and honestly all along."

"Very likely," said the farmer, "very likely. Spilt milk, Mr. Thomas, is a foolish thing to cry over. I'm a dairyman now, and that proverb seems appropriate. But I was never sorrier for anything than I was to read that story in the papers. Neither Zubah nor the missis ever look at the papers so far as I know, but I tore the leaf out and used it bit by bit for pipe-lights lest they should see it. It wasn't pretty reading, for a young woman in particular."

"No," Tom concurred. "It wasn't pretty reading."

"I've heard say, Mr. Thomas," said the farmer, "as your mother left you eight thousand pound. Now if what the papers reported is true—I haven't seen our Christian friend lately, and so I haven't had a chance to ask him about it—if what the papers reported is true, there isn't a great deal of it left."

"No," said Tom, "there isn't much of it left, Moore. There is very little of it left."

"And you've split with the old squire?" Tom returned no answer. "It isn't pleasant to talk about it, Mr. Thomas," pursued the farmer, "and I'm not talking out of idle curiosity. You've split with the old squire?"

"My father and I have quarreled," said Tom.

"Well, that's no wonder," returned the other. "And what are you going to do? You haven't been brought up to do anything."

It was not easy for Tom Carroll to say that he was hawking musical manuscripts from door to door of the London publishers. He tried to answer lightly:

"I will tell you my plans by and by. I have no fears about myself. I have a living at the ends of my fingers, Moore."

"And the old squire's taken up with Mr. Mark, has he?" said the farmer. "I can manage to hold a pen by this time, and when I read that case in the papers I wrote to Wilkins and asked him to send me a line or two about the business. He tells me Mr. Mark prophesies everywhere that you'll come to your own again, and says he's nothing but a warming-pan."

"Yes," said Tom, "Mark has been sanguine all along."

"I'll bet he has," returned Moore, with a dry laugh. Tom looked at him inquiringly. Here again there was an evident suspicion of Mark.

"What do you mean by that, Moore?"

"Mean?" said the farmer, in his crackling voice. "That he *has* been sanguine all along. What the dickens else should he be? He was as poor as a church mouse before the squire took to him, and now it looks as if he'd come in for a pretty penny. Sanguine? I should think he was."

"Then you don't believe that my cousin Mark is doing his best to bring about a reconciliation between my father and myself?" asked Tom. There had been a time not long ago when he would have scorned to speak of these things or to listen to them; but that time had gone by, and his child-like trust in all men had been sorely shaken.

"I never set up to be a Solomon," said the farmer, "but I should never have been such a fool as to believe that of Mr. Mark, Mr. Thomas. About you, now, I might have believed it, for you're one of those saints by nature that the world calls fools, and you'd wait an hour in the rain any day to help the lame dog that bit you over a stile. But Mr. Mark? No, no. That's too ridiculous."

"Well," said Tom, with a dreary look, "there are a good many millions of men in the world who have to make their living, and if am to be one of them I can scarcely think it a misfortune. And, whatever my cousin Mark is doing now, he had nothing to do with the quarrel between my father and me."

"Mr. Thomas," said the farmer, seriously, leaning forward as far as his damaged back would allow him, and tapping his visitor's hand with the waxed end of his long pipe. "Take my tip, sir. Don't rely on a word Mr. Mark may say for you. It will never be said. I've known him since he was that high, and I've reckoned him up pretty completely. I shouldn't wonder if he'd set that nasty story abroad about you. He's the only man in the world, it seems to me, who has to gain by damaging you, and it comes natural to suspect him."

"Either," said Tom, "my cousin Mark is the most patent rascal in the world, or he and I are targets for the whole world's scandal. But I have learned my lesson,

Moore. I have been too much maligned myself to be ready to listen to scandal about other people."

"Very well," said the farmer. "If Mr. Mark's a true man I'll eat him. I've known him man and boy this five-and-twenty years. He's too honest and open and above-board for my taste, is Mr. Mark, sir. You've been a true friend to me and mine. Let me do you a good turn. Leave off trusting Mr. Mark. Play on your own hand. The old squire's a bit hard, and as up-stuck as a hop-pole, but he's as honest as the day. If he guessed Mr. Mark's game as I do, he'd be off with him in an hour."

"Where's the motive?" cried Tom. "Why should he want to injure me? I am out of his way already."

"But you ain't beyond calling back again into his way," said Moore, "and he means to drive you."

It was sufficiently unnatural if it were true, and yet in one way it was natural enough. Tom's heart was turned to suspicion by Baretti, and if he really began to suspect, he felt that he would be dangerous. It is not easy for any man to hold possession of himself when he has been robbed of love, good fame, and fortune, and the youngster was not the Tom Carroll of old days.

"Say no more," he said, waving his hand against the farmer. "I can't afford to believe it. If I knew for certain that your suspicions were true, I couldn't trust myself. And I am ill-tempered and vile-hearted enough to believe them. Give me a glass of milk, Moore, there's a good fellow, and I'll get back home."

"Strike that gong on the table, sir," said the farmer, and Tom obeying this injunction, Azubah came into the room.

"Do you want anything, father?"

"Mr. Thomas would like a glass of milk, my dear," said the farmer.

"And, Miss Moore," said Tom, "if you wouldn't mind taking the trouble to bring me one of those crisp little rolls, I should be much obliged. I think there's something unusual in the air down here that gives one a most extraordinary appetite."

He was so poor a pretender, and so unused to lying even in the mildest way, that he boggled over this simple sentence, and the farmer looked at him with more than his common keenness; first he glanced at his fingers and looked

at the rings there, and next his gaze went to the visitor's watch chain.

"Be as good as to tell me the time, Mr. Thomas," he said, when the girl had done. Tom drew out a handsome watch and answered him. The farmer laboriously set his own to the time indicated, and Azubah returned with the roll and the milk. Her father made a faint and scarcely perceptible motion with his head, and those supernaturally bright eyes of his. She caught the gesture and retired again. "Mr. Thomas," he said, when they were once more alone, "I'm ashamed to ask you, after all the favors you've done me, but can you make it convenient to lend me a five-pound note until to-morrow? I'll post it first thing in the morning without fail."

"I'm very sorry," said Tom, "I haven't got it with me. I can send you one this evening."

"Never mind, sir, thank you," said the farmer. "It's not a pressing thing. I must wait until to-morrow."

"No, no," said Tom, "you shall have it."

"It's very good of you, Mr. Thomas," returned the farmer, falling back in his arm-chair with a singular air of relief. "It's only a matter of four-and-twenty hours with me at the outside. The shop's doing splendidly, and I don't know that ever we were better off than we are now. We shall be paying our debt to you, Mr. Thomas, almost directly."

"Thank you," said Tom. "Make it convenient to yourself, Moore."

"Take another roll, sir," said the farmer. "It's a goodish step up to your part of the town, and I reckon it's an hour or two from your dinner hour yet, isn't it? You can easy spoil your dinner by going too long without it."

"Thanks," said Tom, "I'll take another. What charming butter you have here. And the bread is excellent."

"Hunger's a fine sauce, Mr. Thomas," said the farmer, and looking keenly at his guest, he saw a disconcerted look upon his face, and half a blush that overspread its pallor. Tom called for his second roll, and dispatched it together with another glass of milk, and the two were silent.

"I'll go now, Moore," he said rising, and whisking away imaginary crumbs with his silk handkerchief. "I

have business to do. You shall have that to-night. I'll send a commissionaire with it."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Thomas," said the other, shaking the proffered hand. His eyes lost the keenness which had commonly belonged to them since his disaster, and their shrewd suspicions melted almost into tears. "God bless you," he said, as he dropped Tom's hand, "I don't believe a better man ever broke bread."

Tom laughed uneasily, and with a farewell wave of the hand was gone. The farmer sat with bent head for a minute or two, and then suddenly smiting the table with his clinched hand, he half rose in his chair and fell back in a spasm of pain.

"No good to anybody," he muttered. "If I'd got ten thousand pounds, I'd give a thousand of it to be able to follow him and put the other nine thousand in his hands. The pride of the place! The pride of the place! As handsome a lad as you'll see in a summer's day, and as good as you'll find in a year's journey!"

Tom Carroll walked so slowly from South London to West London that it was dark long before his arrival there. He went irresolutely, and lingered at one or two corners looking about him with a furtive air, which became him ill indeed. Once or twice he seemed to form a sudden resolve and hurried on decidedly, but his step slackened again, and again he lingered at corners, or stared in at jeweler's shop windows. At last he went hrriedly into a by-street and almost ran through a darkened door-way, cannoning against an ill-dressed, slatternly woman who bore a large parcel in her arms.

For two or three minutes a figure had dogged him at a little distance. It waited now in the shadow of the by-street, and when he emerged from the darkened door-way followed him. He was like a man who had committed a crime and feared detection, glancing suspiciously right and left as he went, but he never looked behind and never saw the shadow in his rear. At his own door-way the shadow caught him and laid a hand upon him.

"Oh!" he said, starting, as he turned, "Is that you, Baretti?"

"Yes," said Baretti, "it is I."

Tom began to talk of nothing as they walked upstairs, but Baretti spoke not a word until the two turned into

Tom's sitting-room. Then he silently lit the gas and closed the door and then turned upon his friend. Tom, looking at him, saw that his face was gray and that his eyes were full of tears.

"Carroll," said the little man, with a shaky, husky voice, "it was here—in this room—that I told you all my troubles, and you relieved them. You were rich and prosperous, and I was poor and broken. We were not quite friends in those days—almost strangers—and you were angry that I had not spoken of my troubles sooner. And now, when you saved my life, and gave me hope again and made a man of me, and we are brothers in heart and soul, you can be poor, and you can let me be rich and prosperous and never speak a word. Is it friendly, Carroll? Is it just to me? Ah, Carroll, you love your pride better than you love your friend."

"Why, Baretti, old fellow," cried Tom, lamely, "what's all this about?"

"You do not care for me," said the painter, "or you would not pretend like this, Mr. Carroll." He paused for an instant, and advancing, took Tom's hands in both his. "I have been behind you this last half hour. You have come to your last pound, and you have found my old miserable refuge. No, no, no. Why should you be ashamed or angry that I know it?"

Tom walked doggedly into the next room, and the little man followed him. His voice was altogether broken when he spoke again.

"It is unjust, Mr. Carroll, it is unjust." Tom stretched out a reluctant hand toward him backward, and Baretti clasped it.

"Don't make me break down, old fellow," the youngster said, with a half-hysterical laugh. "I've been through a good deal of worry lately, but I should like to keep a stiff upper lip through it all."

But two slight meals of bread and milk in four days do not furnish the best diet in the world for a man's nerves to be steady on, under pressure of this sort, and with Baretti's tears upon his hand, the hopeless lad turned, and casting his free arm upon the mantel-shelf dropped his head upon it and cried outright. And, bitterly as his own tears shamed him, there was no shame in them, for it was not his unhappiness that made them flow, nor any cowardly

pity for himself, but the sacred hand of sympathy that broke their fountain's stubborn seal.

CHAPTER XXII.

In his native county Tom Carroll had by this time something of a Bluebeard reputation, and he became an almost proverbial illustration what a young man might become by laying himself out to be wicked. To have cleared himself publicly of the charge publicly brought against him went for nothing. Young Mr. Carroll's conduct, it was generally admitted, must have been a terrible blow to his father, and a great deal of sympathy was expended on the elder Carroll's woes. Mark's chastened grief over his cousin's fall from the heights of virtue was noticeable and worthy of notice, and the mild hopes Mark nourished for Tom's final reformation were supposed to do credit to his better nature.

The soil of human intelligence would seem to favor the growth of fallacies, but to be virtuous is not necessarily to be happy, and to be wicked is not necessarily to be unhappy. Conscience, popularly supposed to be a sentry, is so untrustworthy that he will go to sleep on guard unless you watch him keenly; so that he is most active (like other troublesome functionaries) when least needed. To speak of conscience assailing some men except in death's-bed fear or like cases is to talk nonsense. It has long been a cant of criticism that this or that villain of fiction is made credible by humanizing touches, and we are told that there are no men who have not some redeeming virtue. Shakespeare thought otherwise, and drew one or two wholesale villains who had no good points about them, but he had no concern with humanitarian crotchets, and was satisfied to paint men as he saw them. It is a far cry from the intellectual and social level of Iago to that of Bill Sykes, but higher than either, and lower than either, and in all the countless grades between, there are men who share their spirit.

It is not in the least to be supposed that Mark Carroll was unhappy because he was a very finished rascal. If he bit the kind hand that had often fed him, he knew all about gratitude, and had exercised it so long as it had been

useful to him, and his conscience (if he had a conscience) approved his action. If he lied for his own advancement he did it cleverly, and his lies passed for truth, and success was satisfying. To have been a stupid scoundrel would have been criminal, but to be a clever one carried credit with it, and not blame. It was the shameless saying of a great man that a blunder was worse than a crime. Mark carried that creed further, and in his philosophy the only possible crime was a blunder.

He lived in clover at Trench House—was flush of money and had crowds of friends. In the house Tom's name was never mentioned, but outside he heard it often, and his attitude toward his cousin was always beautiful.

"No, no, no," Mark would say when people expressed their sentiments about Tom. "Even the general enemy is admitted to be less black than he's painted. And, hang it all! people talk as if a young fellow never kicked over the traces before. And come now, I put it to you—Don't you think that Tom came out of that libel case very well, all things considered? I'll tell you what it is. Taking it altogether, I think my cousin Tom has been confoundedly ill-used. Lots of fellows have done the same thing in hot youth, and have settled down into respectable church-going citizens afterward; and the chances are ten thousand to one that Tom will do it, if he only gets the chance, poor fellow. But just because he's run a bit wild everybody's down on him like a hammer, and I'm sorry for him—downright sorry, by gad, I am!"

It is a curious provision of nature which fits every animal to his surroundings. The arctic bear grows white, the grasshopper is of the color of the field, fish take the tint of their river bottom, and a persistent liar comes to believe in himself.

It may be noticed that Mark's conversational style had adapted itself or been adapted to that *rôle* of genial allowance which he played. Without actually sinking to the level of unsuspicious stupidity, it had fallen from its habitual height of cynical cleverness, and there was something half bucolic in his very manner. Of course he knew at bottom exactly what a pretender he was, but he had reached the persistent liar's bourn of vague belief for all that, and had touches of indignation and pity when he pretended to have them. Without something of the imagina-

tive and self-projective power of an actor or a poet it is impossible to be a good liar. The simulation of the emotions awakens — not precisely the emotions themselves, perhaps, but—an artistic, thin reflex of them, and this it was which glowed in the bosom of Cousin Mark, and gave his speeches an air of reality when he talked of Tom. But when Mr. Irving leaves the stage, though he has probably suffered all the woes of the Prince of Denmark, and has broken "the recorders" with some approach to real passion, he has no grudge against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and nurses no special brotherly affection for Horatio. The woes, so keenly felt that you and I have thrilled at them, are packed away with the wardrobe of the tragic prince, and the great actor sups—if he takes supper—and blissfully forgets them all.

Mark used to watch within himself the workings of this singular natural process, and used to extract amusement and philosophical edification from it; but to be unhappy, and about his own conduct, so long as it prospered, never entered his mind.

But whilst he went on in glowing ease of mind and constant comfort, there was trouble brewing for him in a quarter he had forgotten to think about. The charming signora was once more out of employment.

It was characteristic of the signora that she felt Mark's desertion less bitterly and hated him less intensely for it when she was prosperous than whilst she was poor. As a matter of fact, thousands of women have committed murder on precisely the signora's provocation, and there were many times when she felt murderous; times at which she would actually have put an end to Mark if he had been in her way. At these moments she would not have paused to think of results, but she thought about them afterward, when the fit of rage had passed, and told herself philosophically that the game was not worth the candle. Only —if she could but catch him on the hip—if she could but see her way to a vengeance that would not be too dangerous to herself— His violent death at her hands would leave a ghost behind, and that would be too much to dare.

The Garrick was closed, and no new opening declared itself. Whilst her engagement had lasted she had a little more money than she needed, and what was over and above her wants she saved. For a week or two she made applica-

tions hopefully, whenever she saw a chance, and then for a week or two despondingly. She was fast sliding back into that condition from which Tom Carroll had rescued her; and all her hope deferred, and all the rebuffs she met, and all the misery she dreaded, went naturally to swell Mark's account and to feed the flame of her hatred for him. If anything had occurred to make her independent of the world, she would still have gone on hating him, but less fiercely. She might in a year or two have sunk into a mere contempt for him; but care coming, and hunger looking near, she set them all down to him, and her hate burned hotly against him.

She had invested a good deal of her small salary in what Mr. Vemmick called "portable property," and now she began to find her way to the pawnbroker's, poor thing!

If we reserved all our pity for those people who are pleasant and good, we should have to restrict our sympathies terribly.

In these straits, and before she reached them, she had often thought of applying to Mr. Bethesda, who might, for all she knew, be ready to start, or preparing to start, another theatrical enterprise. But she did not like Mr. Bethesda. She had not been bred to be a squeamish woman, but she had—as everybody has—her own moral code, and Mr. Bethesda fell short of it. She had had experience of Mr. Bethesda behind the scenes, and that good man's affections for the sex at large had sickened her. Beggars, however, can not be choosers, and at last she sought the residence of the late manager of the Garrick. That gentleman's influence with the brethren had altogether fallen away from a variety of causes, amongst them being the establishment of a Bible class for ladies of the ballet. No man can escape calumny, and the brethren had cut Mr. Bethesda from their communion.

The signora walked all the way from her lodgings to Mr. Bethesda's house, and rang the good man's bell. The good man himself answered to her summons and gave her a fatherly welcome. He had a rare eye for a good-looking woman, and his tastes were catholic.

"Tell me, sare," said the signora, "is ze Garrick again to be open?"

"I can't say," returned Mr. Bethesda. "If I could

find the money I should like to take the house myself. You are looking for an engagement, my dear?"

"I am looking for engagement," said the signora.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Bethesda, smiling and fatherlike, "a handsome young lady like you should find that very easy."

"It is not easy," said the signora, smiling also. "Can you tell me where to go?" If one had any hope of getting anything from Mr. Bethesda, she knew better than to try to get it by wearing a sad face in his presence.

"Pray sit down," said Mr. Bethesda, "and let us talk things over." He placed a chair for the signora and set another at the side of it. She took her seat and he took his. "It is to be regretted," he said, "that Mr. Carroll's enterprise at the Garrick broke down so soon." He took the signora's unresisting hand. "Much to be regretted."

"Very much," said the signora, in her pretty foreign English.

"But poor Mr. Carroll," continued Bethesda, slowly and distinctly so that the lady should understand him and not get tired of his gossip too quickly, "was very extravagant, and is quite ruined, I am sorry to say."

"Poor young man," said the lady, her fingers itching to smack Mr. Bethesda's smile.

"Poor young man, indeed," said Mr. Bethesda. "I suppose you knew him very well?" The signora shook her head. "No?" asked Bethesda, smiling again. "You came to the theater like an old friend."

"I knew him," said the signora, "a leetle. Very leetle. I had seen him two zree times."

"Was that all, indeed?" asked the late manager, still holding her hand and bending forward as he spoke. "May I ask where you saw him—how you came to know him?"

"He come to my husband's house," said the signora. "My husband was the great tenor, Signor Malfi. He would come to my husband's house with Mr. Marco Carroll. Do you know Mr. Marco?"

The signora was the picture of innocence. She was apparently unaware of Mr. Bethesda's possession of her hand, or it might have been an every-day thing to talk in that attitude; and her mention of Mark was made in the most indifferent manner in the world, though she was unaware of a little inward tremor as she made it. The tremor in

degree was not unlike that a maiden experiences when she thinks of her lover in love's early days. In kind it bore a resemblance, for extremes meet, and hate and love are not always perfect opposites.

"Slightly," said Bethesda, edging his chair a little nearer. "Poor Mr. Carroll's fortune has all fallen into Mr. Mark's hands."

"Ah!" said the signora. "How?"

Mr. Bethesda related what he knew, and in the course of his narrative got his chair nearer still and set an arm about the signora's waist. The lady, anxious to hear all, made no objection to his overtures, though her fingers tingled more than ever.

"And is Mr. Mark," she said, catching at the English form of the name with difficulty—"is Mr. Mark a very good young man?" Bethesda had just told her for what Tom had been dismissed by his father.

"I believe," said Bethesda, "that Mr. Mark is a very good young man indeed. Mr. Mark is quite a guileless person, so I am informed."

"And is Mr. Carroll so very good also?" asked the signora.

"Oh," said Bethesda, smilingly, "Mr. Carroll is quite a stern, unappeasable Roman-father-sort of person." The signora did not understand all this, but she caught the tone, and nodded with an answering smile. Bethesda, who was in quite a lover-like posture by this time, thought the smile an odd one, and felt disconcerted by it.

"And," said the signora, still smiling, "if Mr. Carroll heard bad things of Mr. Mark he would send him away also?"

"I should think so," said Bethesda.

"Oh, dear me!" said the signora in her pretty foreign manner. "What a hard work to be forever so good young man! Where does he live, this good young man? The old one, is he very rich?"

"Very!" said Bethesda.

"Where does he live?" asked the signora again.

Mr. Bethesda told her what he knew, and made tender play with his hands in the meantime, squeezing the signora's hand and waist. She might have been a lay figure, she took all this so quietly; but when he had spoken she rose and disengaged herself.

"I shall go now," she said. "If you hear of anyzing, will you let me know, zare?"

Mr. Bethesda, protesting that he would, advanced with the obvious intention of kissing the signora. Her previous acquiescence in the good man's tender approaches might have encouraged one much more bashful than Bethesda, and it was a surprise to him when, as he smilingly proffered his salute, the signora slapped his face. It was not the encouraging sort of box on the ear with which some ladies beckon on their lovers, but laid on with a quick and heavy hand. The wooer was so staggered by it, mentally, and for a few seconds his head rang so, that he let the lady go without a word in answer to her cool "Good-day."

When he followed the signora was already in the street. She smiled and nodded at him across her shoulder, and went her way, leaving the good man in a state of some depression and bewilderment. She, on the other hand wore an expression altogether different from that with which she had approached Mr. Bethesda's house. Her head was erect, her step elastic, her eyes smiled, and there was a fine glow of color on her southern cheek. For she saw clear before her what she had longed for many and many a weary day, and she marched to it as a hungry man walks to a well-furnished table. If the elder Carroll had dismissed his only son on grounds so slight, he would be scarcely likely to have mercy on a nephew against whom she could prove so much. She would go down and denounce Mark and rejoice in his ruin. It would be cheaper than killing him (that was altogether too fearful a joy for her to dare to snatch it—she had thought of it too long), and it would be a vengeance more complete and lasting. With all her hunger of hate for Mark she had a sense of justice too. To her mind, naturally enough, Mark was the greatest villain in the world, and she could conceive of nothing worthy to be matched with his perfidy. The signora was a simple-minded person, and did not bother herself with intellectual subtleties of any sort, or she might have called to mind the fact that if anybody else had suffered by it she would have thought Mark's perfidy a trifle. But your tooth-ache is always worse (to you) than mine; and I am never so persuaded of the solemnity of the problem presented for solution by the criminal classes as I am when I discover that my pocket has been picked. That which is

nearest touches us most, and our own affairs are generally closer to us than those of other people.

It never occurred to her how easily Mark might turn her attack, or how hard it might be to get into places in which her denunciation of him would serve her turn. She walked on full of hate and hope, thinking of her monetary resources, and planning to sell this and the other lately acquired bit of finery, to make a purse for the journey. Beyond her revenge her thoughts did not carry her, and this alone might have seemed to make her dangerous if Mark had known of it. For without one conscious thought about the matter she was burning her boats, and if Mark could parry the one attack she had in mind that momentary success would make things worse for him.

The signora's walk had given her an appetite, which she was disposed to fight for economy's sake. She was dreadfully thirsty also, and the sight of a dairy shop, exquisitely clean and neat in its arrangements, was pleasant to her. A glass of milk would at once assuage thirst and fortify her system, whilst it would only cost a penny. So the signora entered, and found herself face to face with Azubah Moore, who was tranquilly stitching away with a book in her lap behind the white-scoured counter, with its clean glasses and glittering measures.

"My dear!" said the signora, in pleased amazement, "how do you do?"

Azubah, with no very exuberant professions of delight, arose and shook hands with her. The signora began to question and to chatter in her foreign lively way, and liquid foreign English. Had Azubah taken a place here? Had she determined to sing no more? How had she been doing, and what had she been doing since the signora had last seen her? Azubah answered quietly that this was her father's shop, that she was still studying music, and that she was very well indeed. The Italian woman got her glass of milk, and sat down at the counter to talk. She had tried to befriend Azubah, and that for one thing made her feel friendly; and in the time of her beginning of distress Azubah had been sympathetic. Altogether the signora was delighted at this encounter, and for the moment she forgot her hatred, and her heart rested. She chatted about her troubles, and told how poor she had been when she obtained an engagement at the Garrick and how kind-

ly the lessee had behaved to her. It was natural that she should be pleased to boast an acquaintance with the lessee, whom she had known in her better days, before Tito went mad and mistrusted her.

"He is ruin, now," said the signora, "and I am sorry. He was never wise, but he was good and nice. It was sad for him that he should ever go to the Megatherium that night you sung there."

"Why?" asked Azubah.

The whole truth, or very nearly the whole truth, came out. The signora had told the tale pretty often already to her fellow chorus-singers at the Garrick since the beginning of the libel proceedings, and the first renewed allusion to the leading article in "The Mirror." But Azubah had never seen "The Mirror," and had never heard a word of Mr. Moss's action for assault until this moment. She had many and many a time thought of Tom Carroll as he had stepped in between that terrible little Hebrew and herself, and had remembered how noble he had looked, and with what strength and courage he had acted. Tom himself had never been proud of having thrown Mr. Moss down-stairs, but Azubah had looked on the deed with reverent admiration, and had never dreamed that such awful consequences could grow out of it. She began to feel as if she personally were responsible for the ruin which had fallen upon Tom Carroll, and so much worship and gratitude and pity filled her heart that it felt like to break. She clasped her hands and cried out more than half unconsciously:

"Mr. Mark was there! Oh, why couldn't he tell his uncle how it happened? He would know everything."

"Ah, my dear," said the signora, nodding her head three or four times. "Mr. Mark is going to have the fortune. He will do anything to harm his cousin."

"Oh, I am sure you are wrong," cried the girl. "I have known him since I was quite a little child."

"I have known him, too," said the signora. "I know many things of him. He is bad man, my dear. There is no man more bad in England. I know. I know. I know."

"How do you know?" asked Azubah. "How can you know?"

"My business!" said the signora, smiling. "I know." She nodded her head again, two or three times, in a curi-

ously threatening way, which the girl was altogether at a loss to understand. "He is very happy now, Mistare Mark. Very well. Wait. A week. Not more than a week."

With this she laid a penny upon the counter, which the girl pushed back again. The signora was not above economy at this time, and returned the coin to her purse with another nod and a strange smile. She kissed Azubah across the counter, and said "Good-bye," and walked off toward her vengeance. When you love or hate, the whole world is naturally full of the object of your thoughts, and it did not at all surprise her to find two people on one day who made Mark the theme of their talk.

Azubah, sitting with idle hands from which her work had fallen, thought over the revelation the signora had brought her. Unstinted admiration and profound pity were in her heart, and when a girl begins to lavish these two upon a young man, it is easy to guess on what road she is traveling. Azubah had not far to travel, but she was a stranger to the road, and did not recognize the bourn that lay before her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOORE received the five-pound note he had asked for and sent back another in exchange for it. It soothed him to get it, for he had guessed the truth about Tom's financial position, and now he was sure that his guesses had been mistaken, or had, at least, flown further than the mark.

Tom, of course, if he had had the choice, would rather have died than have broken down as he did in Baretti's presence, but his break-down did him good after all. Lording seemed fairly estranged now. Mary sent him no message of hope; he was ruined and everybody knew it; he had even got bread this last two days by a subterfuge of which —though it was not very shameful—he felt ashamed. Bethesda found a curious difficulty in realizing the properties at the Garrick, which might at least have staved off starvation for a month or two. They had cost two or three thousand pounds, and were worth something still, and the unexpired lease of the theater was supposed to be worth a thousand, yet he could not touch a penny piece. But it was Baretti's friendship, and not these things, grievous as

they were, which broke the youngster's self-restraint and gave him the blessed relief of tears.

He was less ashamed of himself than he would have been if he had cried in the presence of an Englishman, and Baretti saw nothing shameful in the whole matter, but wiped his own eyes unaffectedly, and without any attempt at the disguise of his emotions. Tom pushed him from the room, and being alone, pulled himself together and cleared away the traces of his tears. Then, with a guilty air, half hang-dog and half defiant, he rejoined the little Italian and began to smoke moodily.

"Carroll," said the painter, "let us talk of your affairs." Tom puffed away with an expression almost sullen. "You will finish Opera number two?"

"I don't know," said Tom. "I think I shall go and fiddle in the streets. I suppose one could make a living that way if it is worth while making a living at all. I'm not quite sure that it is."

"My troubles were less than yours," said Baretti, "but it was you who taught me how to live them down. You will teach yourself the same lesson. You are too proud to let any man say that you gave up the fight because it went against you."

Tom smoked on and gave no sign of having heard this, but it was put in just the right way to touch him, and when Baretti had kept silence for a minute or two the young fellow rose and shook himself.

"Nobody shall say I threw up the sponge," he said, doggedly. "No, I'll fight till I go under, for good and all."

"I know that," said Baretti. "It is your nature. You can not help fighting in such a case. Let us lay the plan of the campaign. In the first place, Carroll," the painter rose to say this, and, with his old gesture, laid both hands on his friend's shoulders and looked up into his face, his own lambent eyes agleam with affection and appeal—"in the first place, Carroll, there is to be no more of to-night's work as long as there is a pound at the bank belonging to either of us."

"I can't be dependent upon you, Baretti," returned Tom.

"No," said Baretti, "you love your pride better than you love me. Between friends, there is no giving and tak-

ing—everything is in common. Understand, Carroll. Whatever is mine is yours, and if you do not take it at your need we are not friends any longer, and you are a humbug and a pretender and no true man and honest gentleman. If you refuse me I swear to Heaven I will draw every penny I have and throw it in the Thames, and never speak to you again."

Tom laughed at this singular resolution, in a forced and unreal way, but he took the two hands Baretti stretched out in appeal and shook them both.

"Very well," he said, "we won't put you to such extremities as that. I can make a living, and there is something to come out of the fire yet. And perhaps in the end even my father may come to reason."

"He will never come to reason whilst your cousin Mark is at Trench House," said Baretti. "I speak in kindness, Carroll. Cherish no delusive hopes. In the pursuit of art there is a future before you, but you must not demoralize yourself by fancies which are doomed beforehand to disappointment. Mark is your enemy, Carroll."

"Don't talk of my cousin Mark in that way," said Tom. "I am getting a little tired of these charges against my cousin Mark. I never knew an honester fellow in my life, and I've suffered something from scandal on my own side, and I won't listen to it."

"Well," said Baretti, "there are plenty of assurances of Mark's friendship in his own handwriting in that writing-desk of yours, and you have come to a time when you may very fairly try them. Then suppose you see your cousin Mark and put him to the test. He will not part with a penny for your sake."

"I sha'n't ask him," said Tom, shortly.

"At the bottom of your heart you know him as well as I do," cried Baretti.

"A little better," Tom answered.

"You dare not ask him," said the painter, with his hands abroad. "You dread lest he should prove a villain."

"I know perfectly well," said Tom, "that he would prove nothing of the sort."

"He knows of your losses by the newspapers," said Baretti, declaiming indignantly, "and does he write from the home he usurps to offer you a helping hand? Why does he

pretend to be advancing your cause?'' he demanded, with a sudden coldness of voice, and eyes half closed. "Because he is plotting behind your back, and wishes not to be suspected. Who set that libel about? Who but your cousin Mark? Carroll—I am indignant at your infatuation!''

"Baretti,'' said Tom, moved by several contradictory emotions which he did not care just then to analyze, "I will disprove this foolish charge of yours, before I begin to be ass enough to believe in it. I will go down and see Mark, and tell him what a hole I am in, and you shall see how he will act.'' After all Tom would rather borrow of Mark, with whom he had been like a brother all his life, than even of Baretti, and Mark, in point of fact, owed him a good few hundreds, and would only be repaying a little out of his abundance. That was one reflection. Another, which was in flat contradiction to it, was, that he would like to be sure of Cousin Mark, and in a certain case to have it out with him; and yet another was that he had it in his power to clear Mark's character from an aspersion even viler than any that had been cast upon his own.

He sat down and wrote a brief note to Mark, telling him that two days later he would be at the King's Arms Hotel, in the county town, and would be greatly obliged if Mark would meet him there. There could surely be no shame in asking Mark, to whom he had lent so much, to restore a little of it, and yet the impracticable, unpractical young man blushed as he wrote, and had more than half a mind to throw the note into the fire. Wishing it unwritten, and feeling sore with himself for having at last taken up Baretti's challenge, he walked out with the painter and dropped his letter into a postal pillar, and then returning, penciled a few lines to Moore, inclosed the promised five pounds with them in an envelope, found a commissionaire, dispatched him, and went to supper.

He thought it curious, now that he had money to sup elsewhere, that he could find the heart to order the meal at home again. He had paid two months' rent in advance to oblige his landlady long ago, and had always kept in advance afterward—after his own business fashion, which was to pay everybody twice over if possible—and he had not felt afraid to occupy the rooms for a week or two, but he had not been able to find courage to order so much as a breakfast since his pockets were emptied. But now he be-

gan to be a little hopeful again. Mark would let him have fifty pounds at least, and he would make that last him for three or four months by dint of strict economy. In the meantime Bethesda could be pricked into action, and the theatrical properties and the lease must go at a sacrifice. Then he would be out of harm's way, and could at least dine every afternoon, whilst he wrote Opera number two, or took to playing at concerts, or gave lessons, or prepared to hold body and soul together in some way. It did not seem very well worth while to hold body and soul together under the conditions, apart from the fighting instinct in him.

On the following evening he took train to the county town, and got as far as Birmingham without adventure. At the railway station there an odd thing happened, for he ran full against Signor Malfi, who was walking along the platform at a great pace, talking volubly in his native language to a bearded friend. Tom's wonder at his presence there was dissipated by the sight of a placard on which were blazoned in red and black letters the words, "Theater Royal. Italian Opera." Beyond a doubt the signor was there in a professional capacity. The Englishman looked absently after him, and noticed something peculiar in his gait—a swift, sidelong motion of the body, and a certain set carriage of the head—as if the signor were anxious for what he was saying to be heard, and at the same time anxious to keep an eye on some person ahead. The bearded man got into the train, Malfi shook hands with him at the window, and Tom forgot all about them. His own affairs were enough for him to think about just then.

He passed a restless night, and on the morrow he got up and awaited Mark. Mark did not appear, having other fish to fry at this juncture.

The village of Overhill was a little startled and surprised by the sudden appearance in its midst of a nameless young woman, gorgeously appareled and of evident foreign extraction. She did not seem to know anybody in the place, and did not seem to have any business there. So far as she spoke English at all, she spoke it fluently (though accent and idiom were alike foreign enough to be remarkable in so small a place as Overhill), but the speech of the natives seemed altogether incomprehensible to her. The people at the inn had at first been inclined to refuse her sleep-

ing-room, for she had no luggage, but she had smilingly set down a sovereign as guarantee for her own good intentions.

The foreign lady discovered that Trench House was the residence of Mr. Carroll. She ascertained also, in spite of the conversational difficulties which beset her, that Mr. Carroll's nephew, Mr. Mark, was at this time staying at Overhill, and she manifested a good deal of interest in the house and grounds. On the evening of her arrival she entered the private grounds of Trench House—the lodge gates being open and unguarded—and sat for half an hour on a rustic bench which commanded a view of the illuminated windows of the dining-room. There were two people at table, an elderly man and a young one, and a butler, rather sturdier and broader-shouldered than his tribe commonly are, stood at the side-board, or occasionally moved about the room in the discharge of his functions. So far as the foreign young person could observe, the younger man was exceeding deferential to the elder. When she had sat out her half hour or thereabouts, she arose and walked back down the gravel drive, and through the lodge gates, still unnoticed, and returned to the village inn.

Naturally, all her points were canvassed that evening in the bar-room, and the station-master, who happened to be present, contributed to the discussion the fact that a bearded person who spoke imperfect English had arrived by the same train, and watched the foreign lady into the little omnibus of the inn with obvious interest, had dispatched a curiously worded telegram, and after lingering on the station platform for a couple of hours had gone back again without the transaction of any business whatever. The telegram had been written in Italian, and had contained three words only—"She is here." The station-master, making a shot at the meaning of the first word, supposed the lady's name to be Ella, but declined on professional grounds to reveal the nature of the message. He was pretty sure, however, that the bearded person's sole business was to watch the lady and to see where she alighted. He was the more confirmed in his belief by the fact that the bearded person had arrived at Overhill without a ticket from the county town, and had paid the fare on arrival.

Not to be unbearably mysterious, the foreign lady was no other than the charming signora, and the bearded per-

son was actually a friend of Malfi's engaged in the same company, but out of the cast for that particular day.

When Signor Malfi got down to Birmingham he knew vaguely that he was nearer Mr. Mark Carroll's abiding-place than he had been when in London. Hate is just as good as love for keeping the object of it before the mind's eye, and there scarcely passed an hour in which Signor Malfi did not think of Mark Carroll. It did him good, however, and greatly soothed him to believe that Caterina could be trusted to pay off the score which had been raised by her own infidelity. His supposed propinquity to Mark's abiding-place brought Mark into mind more than ever, and a sudden sight of the signora on a railway platform had given him a new and terrible notion. The signora looked prosperous, yet had no baggage with her, as she would have had, had she been far from home. She was smiling when he had seen her, and had seemed in quite a festal humor, and the signor's idea was that she and Mark were simply under shelter together somewhere in the neighborhood. If that were so he had been more than commonly well fooled, and he was disposed to be more than commonly hurt by the fancy. Caterina's threats against Mark had sounded real enough, and he had believed in them. It might have been reasonable to believe in them now, and to suppose that the fair signora was on her way to execute them, but Malfi's mind was poisoned by jealousy, and he was not in the mood to think of what was or was not reasonable.

He received his friend's message, and he panted to be able to follow. It never crossed him to think that Caterina had gone down for vengeance. It only occurred to him that he had been doubly and trebly fooled. He looked forward with a shaky, terrible delight to the hour when he would be able to get away from the duties which held him and denounce and curse them both. His programme went no further. But though he was on pleasure bent, he had a frugal mind, and he did not care to risk the loss of his engagement. He stayed out the morning rehearsal, therefore, and being out of the cast for the evening, he took the midday train for Overhill.

Mark got Tom's letter, and laughed over it to himself. He put a ten-pound note in his purse, and arranged to split his little all with his cousin. Mr. Carroll the elder had opened a banking account for him and treated him in

all respects as he had treated Tom aforetime, but Mark did not see his way to a mention of that circumstance. He told his uncle that he was going into town to see after a gun which had suffered some trifling mishap and had been repaired.

"I am in need of exercise," said Mr. Carroll the elder. "I will walk with you to the railway station."

Mark bustled about in an affectionate, half-reverential *bonhomie*, and got the elder man's hat and walking-stick. Mr. Carroll the elder liked that sort of service, and was pleased, but Mark took it as a matter of course to open doors for him and the like, as if he had been a marquis of the old *régime* and Mark a sort of privileged upper servant.

The two set out together, and it hit Mark like a hammer to see the signora walking calmly along the one street of the village as if she had lived in the place all her life. She smiled when she saw Mark and recognized him by a mere drooping of her eyelids, which she made to act in place of a nod. The ready gentleman was for the space of one heart-beat as white as marble, and for the space of another or so he blushed like the red, red rose. His foot tripped, once only, and he walked on as calm to outward appearance as before. The lady saw these signs and smiled again. She was going to crush him and ruin him, but she was not so poor an amateur in revenge as to do it all at once. She followed him slowly and at ease, accommodating her pace to the solemn, ponderous, and somewhat gouty step of the elder gentleman. She recognized him also, and she had noticed anew the deferential character of Mark's manner toward him. She either read in the elder's face or translated into it out of her own hopes a certain inflexible, dogmatic look, which argued well for her scheme, she thought. So she walked behind her victim, well pleased, and he glancing round casually saw her smile and cursed her, and went on talking in his own charming way for his uncle's pleasure.

It befell that Mr. Carroll found himself a little fatigued before much more than half-way to the railway station was accomplished. It had been at his own command and expense that the line was carried so far from Trench House, and he was willing to suffer for it, but to-day he had no need to go so far. When he parted from Mark he passed the signora, and for all his grandeur and stateliness he

could not avoid looking at her once, for curiosity, and once for a curious, extorted kind of admiration. She quite realized the elder Carroll's idea of a fine woman, and when he had fairly passed her he arranged his gold-rimmed eyeglasses and turned for another glance at her. It discomfited him curiously to find that she had turned to look at him, and that Mark had at the same moment turned to look at her. What business had she to look at him? and what business had Mark to look at strange and foreign young women? He walked with added dignity after this.

Mark rejoiced that his uncle had left him, because he had now a free field in which to tackle this young woman. What did she want? To extort money? Or to ruin an old and faithless lover? Or was she here by some curious chance and not by intention? He resolved to know, and that right early.

When he was persuaded that Mr. Carroll was fully out of sight he took a divergent course and strolled through a field or two. Then, lighting a cigar, he sat down upon a stile and awaited the signora's coming. To his immense disgust she passed the first stile over which he had climbed, giving him a sweeping courtesy as she went.

"Damn the woman," said Mark. "She thinks I am afraid of her, and wants to play cat and mouse, does she? Very well, my lady. I suppose I'd better have it over."

He arose and walked briskly back into the road, and there was the signora placidly strolling ahead of him. He followed, and came up with her easily. The road was quite clear, and there was no great fear of being observed in her company.

"My charming Caterina," he said, in her own language, as he came to her, "it is a pleasant surprise to see you here."

"Is it not?" she asked him, without turning her head.

"It is, indeed."

"I am so glad to please you," said the signora, smiling. "You know that I made you a promise a long time ago. I am here to keep it. I have heard what a very good man your uncle is. I have heard that he is so very good that he could not even tolerate the poor, stupid innocent, your cousin. I am here to tell him what a good young man *you* are, and to help to fix you in your place, dear friend."

"Thank you, my Caterina," said Mark, suavely. "Shall I tell you something you do not guess?"

"If you please," said Caterina, smiling still.

"You are the cast-off mistress of my cousin, and your object here is to extort money from me by threats. The first policeman we meet will see you out of the village to oblige me, and to avoid scandal he will do it quite quietly." She stood still in the road to look at him, and there was no vestige of her late smile in her eyes.

"You see, Caterina," said Mark, "that it is scarcely worth your while to play with me."

"I suppose," she said quietly, and in a sort of wonder at him, "that you have told lies about your cousin all along."

"Assuredly," said Mark. "I shall tell lies about you if you make it necessary, and I shall be believed. That is the way of the world. Your injured innocence remains uncredited, poor Caterina, and my practical villainy once more succeeds."

"Marco," said the signora, "you misunderstand. I told you that I was dangerous. You do not know how dangerous I am."

It was only within the last minute or two that she herself had begun to guess that.

"My good child," said Mark, "I am not in the least afraid of you, and I am not likely to be. I thought it well to see you at once and have the thing over. You sung in my cousin's theater, and everybody down here is willing to believe anything of him. I am very sorry that he has sunk so low as to send you here to extort money from me for his own necessities, but if I am forced to say so I shall say so, and there is an end. I shall be believed. Nobody will understand what you try to say in answer, and if they did understand you, nobody would believe you."

She felt foiled and desperate. There was a diabolical reason in this cool villainy which staggered her. Why should people believe her? And how should they understand her?

"Marco," she said, quickening her pace to keep up with him, for he had begun to walk on as if the conference had ended, "Marco, you will drive me to kill you if I can not be revenged in another way. Take your choice."

"If you are not gone in two hours," said Mark, tran-

quilly, "I shall report your threats to the police, and shall order your removal. Silly child, I don't want to hurt you, but I won't have you in my way."

She walked on after him downcast and lowering in look.

"I can not go away," she said, after a while, in a tone which seemed to Mark's ears to admit that she was vanquished, "I have not money enough to go back with."

"Well, as for that," said Mark, "I am not so hard that I will not help you." He thought of the ten-pound note in his purse, but Mark never liked to part with money, and there was a partial claim upon that already. "You may stay till evening. A train leaves at eight o'clock. Do you see that little copse? Do you see that white road across the fields, which leads from it to the railway-station? Meet me there—near the great tree at the edge—do you see it?—and I will give you enough to carry you back. For once I will deal mercifully with you, but if you come again I will do that which will make you sorry till you die. Good-day, Caterina."

He walked on slowly, and she turned as if broken, and when he looked after her she was crawling along dispiritedly with hanging head. Had he known her thoughts he would have been less satisfied.

For all his outer coolness he had been so absorbed in speech with her that he had neither seen nor heard the departure of the train, though the warning bell and whistle had sounded clearly, and the train had gone smoking over the winding rails through half a mile of open country.

"Too late, Mr. Mark," said the station-master. "That's a fine lassie yonder, sir, if you'll excuse me saying so. There's nobody down here, though, so it seems, that talks her lingo. I suppose you understand those outlandish tongues, having traveled, sir?"

Mark had been seen there in the act of talking with her. Well, his lie was ready.

"You can hold your tongue, can't you, Leggatt?" he said, looking round in a confidential, secret way. "You've heard of my poor cousin's doings up in town. That's one of the painted trollops that sung at his theater, and she's down here on the lookout for him, poor beggar. I've promised her a pound or two to go away quietly and not to bother him."

"Poor Mr. Thomas!" said the station-master. "He

used to seem as good a sort as ever broke bread. He've brought his pigs to a baddish market now, though, haven't he?"

Mark assented sorrowfully, and walked away. Perhaps it would be as well not to leave Overhill to-day. The signora might recover audacity in his absence. He went back and explained that he had missed the train and he stayed in-doors all day.

Tom, meanwhile, waited and waited. There was no answer to his letter, and it appeared as if no notice were to be taken of it. Toward evening his suspicions of Cousin Mark began to side with Baretti's, and he incontinently took train to Overhill. He would make no disturbance there, but he would have the truth out of Mark at least.

As he alighted from the train the station-master saw him and saluted. The village people knew him, of course, and most of them sheered off from him, though one or two hats were raised.

"Can I speak to you just a second, Mr. Thomas?" said the station-master. "I wouldn't be seen up village to-night, if I was you, if you'll excuse me, sir. There's that foreign young person down here, sir, and I gather from Mr. Mark that there'll be a row if she sees you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Tom looked with a changeful countenance at the station-master.

"What do you mean by saying that you gather that from my cousin?" he asked, after a pause which was remarkable for its length and for the indications of emotion in Tom's face whilst his silence lasted. "Tell me what you gather from my cousin Mark?"

"Well, sir," returned the station-master, defensively, "I spoke in friendship, sir, and I trust there'll be no ill-will because I dared to mention it. Mr. Mark deposes that the foreign person is looking for you, sir, and he seems to think that if she sees you the fat will be in the fire."

"Why?" asked Tom, briefly.

"Well, sir," said the man, with a laugh, awkward and embarrassed, "that's for you to say."

"I want to understand this, if you please, Leggatt,"

said Tom, grasping his stout walking-cane with both hands, and speaking with some difficulty and slowness. "What has my cousin told you?"

"Well, sir," returned the station-master, "in round English, he told me nothing that *he* ought to be ashamed of. I don't know about your share in the matter."

"What did he tell you?" asked Tom again.

"Well, sir," said the man, with a touch of virtuous indignation, "he did say that the young woman was one of the trollops that Overhill's heard too much of. I'm sorry I took the trouble to speak about the matter, sir. She's in the village, if you like to face her."

"It's curious, Leggatt," said Tom, "how easy it seems for everybody to believe evil of a man. I must see this young lady, and find out who she is at least. Tell me one thing. Has— Never mind. Good-day, Leggatt."

Tom swung out of the station, and the master watched him as he walked toward the village. The lad was reckless by this time. Mark's desertion of him seemed definite enough, and though Tom could not as yet grasp the details of the new situation, it was plain that his cousin was maligning him, and plain that Baretti's suspicions had all along been well founded. Tom thought of the old days when he had been prosperous, and had stretched out a free hand to Mark. He remembered the countless favors he had done him, and the affection he had always felt for him, and every memory made Mark's villainy the blacker.

"I shall kill him if I see him now," he said to himself, and slackening his pace he began to walk indeterminately.

Even at this time the habit of his whole life and the bent of his whole nature asserted themselves, and he began to seek explanations and to cling to excuses for Mark. It was not altogether impossible that Mark's faith in him had been destroyed by the constant rumors about him. Other people had fallen away from him, and Mark need after all have been guilty of no such willful crime as Tom's thoughts imputed to him. Mark and Tom were such old sailing companions. Almost anything seemed more credible than that Mark should have deliberately cut the ties of countless favors, of friendship, and of blood, to leave the cousinly craft adrift. That he should fire into it began to seem hardly believable at all.

"If I find it all true—" said Tom to himself, a hundred

times. Then he would grasp that stout walking-stick more tightly, and his nerves would tingle, and his cheeks flush and eyes glitter. "Mark's like the rest of them, and can't keep his faith in an old friend against scandal." That reflection was only sorrowful, and carried no rage with it like the other. And, sorrowful as it was, it had a little comfort in it. You would rather your friend should wrongfully suspect you of evil than that he should deliberately turn traitor.

Now came still evening on, and Tom was yet walking indeterminately about the fields and lanes. He was half disposed to go back and leave Mark alone, and half disposed to walk boldly up to the house of his birth and demand to see Mark there and have it out, when chance, which decides for so many of us, decided for him. Cousin Mark heaved in sight, tranquilly smoking a cigar and twirling a walking-cane. Tom rose from the stile on which for the last minute or two he had been sitting, and went forward to meet him. Mark caught sight of him as he rose, and for a second the ready young man's foot lingered on the road, and his swift faculty of invention struck out all round in search for an impromptu weapon of defense.

"My dear fellow," he said, hastening forward, and taking Tom by the hand, "don't you think you are acting somewhat precipitately in coming here?"

"It may turn out that I am a little late rather than a little precipitate," Tom answered. Mark's hand thrown toward him in vigorous welcome had mechanically drawn his own to meet it, but Mark felt no answering pressure to his own honest grip.

"What do you mean, Tom?" he asked. There was a tone of wounded friendship in his voice.

"Let me ask you one or two questions," Tom said quietly, though his voice shook.

"Willingly, my dear fellow," answered Mark. "Shall we walk the while?"

He put an arm through his cousin's and made a forward step, but Tom stood stock still. Mark permitted no change to reach his face, though his companion's presence there was more than annoying, and in a moment might be dangerous. They were within twenty yards of the signora's trysting-place, and within a few minutes of her time.

"I want to ask you, to begin with," said Tom, huskily, and slowly, "if you have lost all your faith in the professions of innocence I have made to you?"

"What a question!" said Mark, turning his face upon him in surprise. "Good God, my dear fellow, No. A thousand times No."

He made another movement to step forward, and again Tom stood immobile and irresponsive.

"You believe," said Tom, speaking more huskily than before, and withdrawing his arm from Mark's, so that he might stand squarely in front of him—"you believe now, as you have always professed to believe, that I have been maligned?"

"I don't merely believe it, Tom," said Mark, "I know it."

"Then," asked Tom, laying a sudden hand upon the lapel of Mark's coat, "why do you spread the scandals?"

"I spread the scandal?" said the other, with an air of indignant amazement and remonstrance. "What absurdity is this?"

"Leggatt, the station-master," said Tom, with a tightening grip upon Mark's coat, "gathers from my cousin Mark that one of the young women of whom Overhill has heard too much in connection with my name is down here to look after me."

"Leggatt," said Mark, "is a drunken liar."

"Thank you," said Tom. "Come and tell him so in my presence, Mark."

Mark reached out both hands quietly, and took Tom pretty firmly by the shoulders.

"I sha'n't do that, Tom."

"Why not?" Tom demanded.

"I can't afford to lose the confidence of the village people." The hand upon the lapel of Mark's coat so far relaxed that Mark by the mere act of sliding his hands from Tom's shoulders to his arms removed it. The two were standing face to face, and were looking in each other's eyes. Tom's face was flushed, and Mark's was white, but the white face was the steadier of the two.

"Do you mean," said Tom, "that you can not deny it in his presence?"

"Quite right, Tom," answered Mark, entwining his gloved fingers firmly in the sleeves of his cousin's coat.

"You have found me out, as there was always a chance of your doing, and things have gone on so well with me that I don't much care. My footing is pretty safe now, and nothing you can say or do can shake me. But if I give one of the villagers the chance to say I am a liar, I pull down my own stronghold." Tom stood quite still, breathing hard and slow, and looked Mark in the eyes. Mark looked back at him and spoke like a victor to an enemy. "It was likely enough that you would have to know one day or other. You know now, and I suppose we declare open warfare."

Mark's grip on his cousin's sleeves was firm and hard, and he waited with wary eye, and every muscle ready. He could guess partly at the rage and wonder and contempt which chased each other in Tom's mind and were faintly mirrored in his face.

"You infamous scoundrel!" cried Tom. "You villain." Mark looked at him steadfastly, and Tom, making a backward movement of aversion and disdain, found himself pinioned in his cousin's grasp. "Let me go," he cried. "You infamous hound."

Mark, with his eyes still steadfastly fixed on Tom's, released him. There was no threat of immediate personal violence in the manner of the man whom he had wronged, and to Mark that was satisfactory. He knew the emotions to be complex things, and he had expected that Tom would find his chief solace in contempt, or in what he supposed to be contempt—a mental condition founded chiefly—according to Mark's analysis—on hate and envy.

"I begin to know now," said Tom, who might have been the detected villain of the two, he looked so disturbed by contrast with the other. "I have heard you describe yourself often enough. But I never thought that a man could be such a dastard." Mark held him with a glittering eye and kept silence. "You think you have won? You think you are safely seated?" Not a word from Mark, not a sign. Only that persistent, unchanging, watchful glance, cool and wary and wicked. "An honest man's contempt is too slight a weapon to pierce that callous hide of yours! You hound."

When the blow came Mark was ready for it. Tom's stick lashed out straight at his face, and Mark parried, like

the skillful player that he was. But Tom's rage, which might have wreaked itself in one stroke, if the one stroke had taken effect, carried him beyond all restraint when he found it intercepted, and casting away his stick he hurled himself bodily upon Mark, and took him by the throat. As quick as lightning Mark crooked him by the heel and fell upon him.

"Don't fight like a wild beast, my good fellow," said Mark, regaining his feet. "I don't want to hurt you, and you can't hurt me. I could kill you in five minutes, and if you have a grain of sense left you know that."

Tom rose a little dazed and staggered. The evening was closing rapidly, but there was still light enough for a man to see to fight by, and he rushed at Mark once more, but only to be met by a crashing smack half on the jaw and half on the neck. This brought him to his hands and knees sick and dizzy and trembling, and for a full minute he could not rise.

"You can see," said Mark, "what an infernal fool you are. I don't want to hurt you, but I can't stand still and be mauled, and if you will have it you will have it. I always knew you were a fool," he added coolly, with air and voice of contemptuous expostulation, "but, hang it all, can't you see what an ass you're making of yourself now? It's natural enough that you should want to give me a hiding, I dare say, but— Well, if you will, you will."

Tom was up again and making for him once more. Mark could just see his gleaming eyes in the dusk, and wondered if his own shone so. The whole affair was eminently distasteful no doubt, but he was quite quiet about it. It began to be clear that Tom meant to go on trying as long as he had the power to make an effort, and the conflict, one-sided as it was, promised to last some time. By and by there would be the signora as a witness to it, and that odd sense of fun which Mark owned made him laugh at the fancy that the lady might take the aggressor's side.

"That would import a new interest," said Mark, silently and to himself. Tom saw the laugh in his cousin's face (for Mark faced the waning light), and somehow the sudden deep hatred born of the other's cynicism and villainy seemed to cool him. Mark boxed splendidly, and Tom was but a poor opponent for him, though he was not altogether ignorant, and he was altogether fearless. There was one

idea alone in his mind, he was bent on thrashing Mark. In fine, he was dangerous; for science, though it goes for much, is not everything in an encounter with the weapons of nature, and the clumsiest duffer may "get one in" by chance. Tom came up warily this time, and for a minute or nearly neither had an advantage worth naming. Then Tom landed with that unskillful right of his, delivered in direct defiance of art and rule, but telling heavily. Mark's counter was smart but ineffective, and Tom, seeing his chance, followed with the left, put in the right again with the whole weight of his body behind it, and stood over the prostrate Mark, somewhat to his own amazement, victor for the moment.

Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just, and it may be admitted that if ever a man had the right to thrash another, Mark had conferred such a right upon his cousin. Mark's confidence was shaken, and as he rose he said to himself, "I may have to take a hiding after all." Tom, standing by for the renewal of hostilities, said to *himself*, "I shall win." Mark was no coward, but he did not scorn punishment as Tom did, and that went a long way toward balancing the difference in skill, since the least skillful had begun to prove the doctrine of chances. It was getting dark too, and that helped to equalize matters. In boxing you want to see your friend's eye, just as you do in fencing, and there is a curious instinct wakened by practice, which tells you exactly which feature the eye has chosen, and you have telegraphed to you with unfailing accuracy the point of time at which the advancing and retiring left will shoot straight from the shoulder. I write for the ignorant. The learned know these things.

Genuine scorn of pain or disfigurement began to tell. The passion of hate and the stern yearning for a just revenge were stronger than the mere instinct of self defense, and Tom's constitutional stamina was greater than his cousin's. Mark, being knocked clean off his legs for the third time, declined to get up again. He was a young man in whom there was no faculty for shame, and he was getting the worst of it under these unfavorable conditions.

"I have had enough," said Mark.

"I have not," said Tom, grimly. "Stand up."

"I tell you I've had enough," Mark replied, with excusable asperity.

"Stand up," said Tom again, "or I'll cane the life out of you."

Mark stood up, desperate, and prepared to renew the conflict.

"How long?" he asked. "How long do you mean to carry on this business?"

"Till one of us kills the other," said Tom.

The sincerity of this declaration was undoubtable, and Mark felt a chill as he looked at the prospect. This mild, long-suffering fool of a cousin of his had an animal strain in him after all, and could be stirred up to real vengeance. Mark began to fight this time with the energy of desperation, but the steel was taken out of him already, and in two or three minutes he was down once more.

"Stand up," said Tom again. Mark made no answer, and Tom, whose foot touched his discarded cane at this moment, stooped and picked up the weapon.

"Fair play," cried Mark, struggling to his feet.

"You mistake the situation, Mark," said Tom, with a bitter coolness which had a passion of rage within it. "This is not a conflict according to the laws of the prize ring. It is an execution. Come, sir."

To deal briefly with a subject which can have but little charm to the tender-hearted, Tom Carroll held his hand when the walking-cane broke in pieces, but not before. At first Mark took it fighting, but for the last minute or two he was on his knees, and only the cousinly hand upon his collar kept him from falling in a huddled heap upon the turf. When at length Tom threw away the stump of the cane and released his hold, Mark dropped like a limp towel.

"Now I have had enough," said Tom, not altogether unreasonably.

He found his hat, threw the overcoat he had discarded at the second or third round over his arm, and went away, leaving Mark still coiled up on the turf, moaning, and half unconscious. Half an hour had passed before Mark moved, and when he arose he cursed with a subdued intensity which was not unworthy of the situation. He had not merely been royally thrashed, so thrashed that he could scarcely stand or crawl, but he had been thrashed by a man much less able than himself, and the reflection was galling. Still his sense of the fitness of things was not wholly dis-

turbed. He saw that, from Tom's point of view, the night's work looked natural.

Tom, meanwhile, having discharged his mission, walked toward the railway station. In this world things are so ordered that no joy is permanent, no happiness stable. For the first two or three hundred yards the gladness of battle abode with him, but then a shade of compunction began to steal over his heart. He told himself that Mark had deserved all he had got, and more, but he was naturally of a merciful turn, and, except in the heat of passion, could have hurt no human creature, however obnoxious and hateful. The sense of compunction was not strong enough to mount into repentance, but it dashed his vengeful pleasure.

"I have no right to be pleased," said Tom, as he walked. "The work was dirty, though necessary and just; and no man has a right to extract pleasure out of such a business."

Yet he missed the exhilarating glow of revenge accomplished; and, by the time of his arrival at the station he was depressed, and almost miserable. The little first-class waiting-room there had a mirror on the wall, and, catching sight of his own reflection within it, he started with surprise. A cut on the forehead, with dry blood barked about it, looked terrible. His nose and upper lip were of abnormal size, his shirt was open at the collar, his necktie was wildly disarranged, and there were two or three buttons missing from his waistcoat. He had scarcely felt his own damage until now; out of sight was out of mind, but he began to be conscious of sundry aches and pains, and he found that he could scarcely raise his right hand to his head. That fact was, of course, traceable to the vigorous employment of unaccustomed muscles, and was in itself a testimony to the completeness of the castigation inflicted upon Cousin Mark.

Tom walked to the station-master's private door, and knocked there.

"Can you let me have a wash, Leggatt?" he demanded, when the man appeared.

"Certainly, sir," said Leggatt, with polite deference. "Come in, sir."

When Tom walked into the light the man literally jumped.

"God bless my soul, sir," he cried, "you're covered with blood."

"I don't think there's much the matter," said Tom, quietly. "When is the next train?"

"Due in five minutes, sir," said Leggatt, staring at him. "Have you been having a fight, sir, or what? You're awfully knocked about, sir."

"That reminds me," said Tom, with apparent calmness. "When you can find time you had better take the porter with you, and walk up to Marston's Spinney. I think you will find my cousin there. He wants looking after."

The station-master paused in the act of pouring water into a basin, and asked:

"You've had a row with Mister Mark, sir?"

"Yes," said Tom. "We have quarreled, and I have given him a thrashing. I think he deserved it. But he wants looking after, I fancy, and perhaps you had better see to it. If any inquiries should be made after me you can say that I have gone straight up to town."

"I hope to God you've done no mischief, sir," said the station-master.

"He will be all right in a week or two," said Tom, calmly. "A little soap, if you please. Thank you."

The station-master, with distracted visage, stood by whilst the young man washed, and he saw that both hands and the cuffs of his shirt were caked with blood. Tom borrowed a hair-brush when he had washed, and in a minute or two looked half-respectable again. The warning bell rang outside and the two came upon the platform together.

"Good-bye, Leggatt," said Tom, as he stepped into the carriage. It was the last train for the night, and he was the sole passenger from the little Overhill terminus. "There's half-a-sovereign for you. Look after my cousin, if you please. I think it likely that you will find him just at this end of the Spinney. If not, you may make inquiry about him and see if he has got home."

The engine and its three coaches steamed away, and the station-master was left agape on the platform. A minute or two had elapsed before he spoke to the porter, who was preparing to go home, and bade him get a light. The two went together to the place indicated and searched about until they found a patch of trampled grass, evidently the scene of battle. There had been rain within a few hours,

the soft turf had easily torn away, and scores of little patches of bare earth were shown by the light of the lantern.

"Mr. Mark has got up and quitted," said the porter, swinging the light to and fro, "but there's been a pretty tidy conflict by the look of things."

"Hush!" said the station-master. "Listen. What's that?"

There was a heavy groan from near at hand, and the men, hearing it plainly, stood still and trembled.

"There's been a bad night's work here, I'm afraid," said the chief. "A man ain't battered about in fair fight till he cries like that."

"Here he is," cried the porter, after waving his lantern to and fro again. In another moment they stood above Mark Carroll's prostrate figure. He lay all abroad, with his face upward, and his chin pointed to the sky. His arms and legs were flung helplessly into the form of the letter X and at intervals of thirty seconds or thereabouts he groaned terribly. If the two searchers had advanced in silence they must have heard him long ago. Whilst they looked the station-master suddenly dropped upon his knees so that his face came into the circle of light. His shaky forefinger almost touched a something white which stuck out from the breast of the recumbent figure. The porter dropped upon his knees on the other side, and the two glared at each other.

"Stabbed!" gasped one, and the other answered in the same word like a husky echo.

The white object was the ivory handle of a dagger, and the bade was buried in Mark Carroll's body.

"For Heaven's sake," said the porter, "don't touch it. I've heard tell it's certain death, unless you're a doctor. Shall I run for Doctor Marks?"

"No," cried the station-master, rising and recoiling in a single motion. "Stay here. I'll go."

He sped in a shaky horror across the fields, and the porter knelt trembling on the grass, whilst the wounded man beside him groaned at intervals which felt like hours. After an awful time came lights and voices, and figures moved about the field as if in the uncertain horror of a dream. The doctor came with the little crowd of people who had been summoned to assist, and in a while the wounded man

was taken up and borne away in silence or amidst dreadful whispered guesses, and the lights and the frightened faces passed away.

CHAPTER XXV.

When the charming signora left Mark she walked back to the village inn and retired to her own room. At first as she walked her drooping gait deceived Mark, and so long as he looked after her it gave him good reason to believe her vanquished. But before long she began to walk swiftly and her form became more upright, whilst the expression of her face underwent a singular and terrible change. At the house-door before she entered it she sighted one of the yokels of Overhill, and became conscious of her own aspect. As well as she could she smoothed her features, and as she came near she made a shift to assume a smile, which in spite of the best intentions looked forced and a little ghastly. But the yokel, being a yokel, was not good at the reading of facial expression, and only knew that a remarkably fine woman had gone by smiling. Speaking about her over his next pint, the loafer observed that she did seem a good-natured un enough, but when she had passed him her features unscrewed themselves unseen and her look was openly terrible once more. She took off her bonnet and smoothed her hair before the little meager square of mirror on the table by the window, and for a time regarded her reflection steadily, whilst her bosom heaved with a motion at once slow and tempestuous, and her hands were clinched tightly.

In a while she sat down, and for an hour or more she was almost as still as a statue, except for that slow, long-drawn and labored breath and an occasional movement of the hands. The fact was that this charming creature was meditating no less a thing than murder, and the deed looked as awful to her as it could look to anybody. Half her soul clamored for it, and half her soul dreaded it and feared the consequences. Not the consequences which would follow by the penal law, but the slow punishment of her own heart and nerves—the carrying about of a murdered man's ghost with her, in the bright day and the still watches of the night. She knew that her most terrible punishment would be to escape detection, and her thoughts

prophesied to her with frightful clearness. She could see herself going about with that shadowy companion (invisible to all eyes but her own), she could see herself tossing through long nights of secret horror with the image of the murdered man standing vaguely against the curtain of the darkness. Her thoughts went further, and she could see the black shining reaches of the river, and the gas-lamps on either side growing closer and closer as they receded, until they became a fine line of light in the distance, and through the night a woman, driven by a shadowy horror in her rear, and dragged by whispering voices, from the stream, walking with reluctant feet toward the refuge of death. She saw these things and they thrilled her with fears, but she knew that neither they nor anything surmountable by hate or cunning would stay her hand a moment.

He had foiled her in a vengeance at once cheaper and more satisfactory than this would be, and he must pay the penalty. Rather than he should win she was ready to dare and suffer anything. She had set her heart upon his ruin, and had made sure of it and gloated over it beforehand. She had held the cup to her own lips and had maddened herself with thirst to drink it until the temptation of the draught was irresistible. Then at the moment when her lips had touched the brim, Mark's hand, stronger and longer in reach than she had fancied, had taken the cup from her grasp and tossed it away. Perhaps had Mark foreseen what was coming, he would rather have been ruined outright at once, but he did not know how desperate her thirst had grown, or what length she would go to slake it.

The time went by as slowly as it travels in a night of fever, when every hour drags itself into insupportable years, and she sat like a monument of patient hate. Through her open window she could hear the church-clock strike the quarters and the hours, after pauses that seemed incredible, and these were the only sounds she cared to hear or took note of, until a voice suddenly struck upon her ear and brought her to her feet.

This voice was a man's, and it spoke a few words of very foreign-sounding English.

"Tito!" she said to herself in a wondering whisper, and stepping like a cat, she advanced and knelt by the open window to listen. He was asking merely for something to

eat and drink, but he did it so lamely that the country wits of the landlord were sorely tried to understand him. In one respect at least Signor Malfi was a model of the operatic tenor. He had lived long in many countries and had never mastered any language but his own, or tried to master any. In London, Vienna, Brussels, St. Petersburg, New York, or what not, he eat polenta and drank asti spumanti or inferno in an Italian restaurant, and wheresoever he went he had but one theme, the audacity of all other operatic tenors whatsoever in pretending to sing. Even his native vocabulary was limited, and the man was stupid and ignorant and a mountain of egotism.

He had one faculty which in intentness approached the confines of the heroic, and would have passed them had he not been a coward. He could hate. In a bitter, long-lived, slow-burning way his faculty in this direction surpassed that of the signora, and jealousy heaped coals upon his fire and poured oil upon it. He had followed the signora to this out-of-the-way place inspired by hate of Mark and jealousy of her, and he had learned already that Mark Carroll lived in the village, and had Trench House pointed out to him. Mark Carroll was not at first recognizable in the village ears as Marco Carroli, but by dint of perseverance the signor had conquered this obstacle and had learned what he wished to learn. Now murder, if the thing were to be accomplished safely, presented no such terrors to his mind as it did to the signora's, and it was significant of the quality of his hatred that he could eat and drink even whilst it burned its bitterest within. There was nothing clearer in the whole world to his limited intellect than the certainty that Mark and Caterina were again together, and that her pretense of hatred against Mark had been simply a cunning blind. The signor, in spite of his presence there, and his hate and jealousy, set an exaggerated value upon his neck, and yet in spite of that he carried a stiletto with him. If a chance should occur—a safe chance—it would be hard to miss it, and aggravating to think of it afterward. Less than a safe chance he did not feel disposed to take, but he went about (with the usual astonishing ignorance and stupidity of men who contemplate the crime about which he was hovering) to make himself noticeable, and to stamp it on the memories of people that a stranger, who could scarce speak English, and who in an English village

was remarkable in a hundred ways, had been asking about Mark Carroll.

He sat in the front room of the inn looking on the one street of the village, and there, being really hungry and thirsty, he eat bread and cheese, and drank small beer, though he made wry faces over it. Then he tried to question his host, who tried hard to understand him and failed. The signora, who had her window closed, and her bedroom-door open by this time, heard him and understood him well enough. The signor wished to know whether he was aware of the existence of a foreign young woman in those parts; and the landlord without in the least understanding him proposed to answer this question straight and to the point by bringing down the signora herself to translate for him. The landlord firmly believed that all foreigners were Frenchmen, and that all foreign tongues were French.

He mounted the stairs and rapped at the signora's door. At the first sound of his step upon the stair she had silently fixed the latch and retired.

"Excuse me, miss," said he, when she had opened the door again, "there's a Frenchman down-stairs, as I can't make a word out of. Would you, now, just have the goodness to walk down and pass a word with him?"

The signora shook her head, and the landlord, having tried in vain to persuade her, retired and rejoined Signor Malfi.

"There is a young ooman upstairs," said he, "as talks your lingo, and can't scarcely speak any other, but she ain't the sort to help nobody, it seems. There's Mister Mark, now—Mister Mark Carroll—as have traveled in foreign parts, and may be he mightn't mind taking the pains to speak to you, but there's nobody else in the village, onless it's parson, and him I ain't sure about."

This address passed by the signor like the idle wind, which he regarded not. He did not even catch his enemy's name, for the landlord made it Mark Carl as nearly as phonography can do him justice.

"Tank you, sare," said the signor. "Ow moshe?"

This the landlord understood, and answered with his fingers. The signor having settled his little bill, lighted a cigar, asked for brandy, and having by this time exhausted his English, sat quietly sipping and smoking. The sign-

ora had opened her door again and listened, waiting for him to go. After what seemed a long time he got up and went away with a *buono giorno* to the host. Caterina began to breathe more freely. It was evident that Malfi was hunting her for some purpose of his own, and she was indisposed to lose her one immediate chance of vengeance. She peered at him through the rough curtains of imitation lace, and saw him sauntering down the road. Perhaps he had given up the hunt, with whatever purpose it had been started. She resumed her bonnet and went down-stairs to look after him. The freedom of the open air began to invite her, and she had felt half stifled in her chamber. When the signora walked round the first bend in the straggling village street she waited for a minute only, and then, gathering her mantle about her more closely, walked briskly in the opposite direction to that he had just taken. Once out of the village she made a detour by the fields, and then began to approach the copse at the end of which Mark had arranged for the evening interview. Reflecting that it would not be wise with such a deed as she had in view to be seen too much in that immediate neighborhood, she turned back suddenly and discovered the signor at a little distance. She knew at once, as if by instinct, that he had been dogging her steps, and determined to face him at once and to have his business over. Malfi, on his part, seeing that she walked to meet him, stood stock-still, with his black eyes blazing and his skin a dirtyish olive-gray. Her eyes were aflame, too, and her bosom heaved faster than common.

"Well," she said, facing him boldly, "what do you want with me?"

"You are like all women," he answered, with all the courage he could summon. "You are a liar and a pretender. But I have found you out at last, and I am bent upon revenge."

"So am I," she answered.

"You blinded me once," he said, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, "but you will blind me no more. I was a fool to believe you, but you acted well."

"You were always a fool, Tito," she said, contemptuously; "and you have undergone no change. You are not safe here, for I am desperate, and you will do wisely to go away."

"Not until I have killed him or you," said the Signor Malfi.

The signora laughed at him, and the signor did not indeed look especially formidable on the outside that moment. His eyes had lost half their fire, and he looked hither and thither rather than face her steady glance. The woman frightened him, and he began to wish that he had let her alone, though he found himself compelled to brag and bully a little before he went.

Now the lady herself had been ready enough to threaten Mark before she had meant any real mischief against him, in a general sort of way. But now the reticence which often accompanies real hate (just as it accompanies the rival passion) stepped in between herself and any proclamation of her intent.

"You!" she said scornfully. "You are too much a coward to kill anybody. Why are you here? Are you jealous of me, you poor fool? What do you want?"

"Blood!" said Tito, with a melodramatic snarl. He had seen a good deal of melodrama in his time, and he knew what ought to be effective on the sort of stage he had most patronized in youth. But he was beginning to feel a want of earnestness in the part he played—the woman's eyes daunted him, and she had altogether the stronger spirit—so that the dramatic monosyllable and the snarl excited nothing but an angry ridicule in the signora's mind.

She smiled and waved him away, and there was an expression in her smile so terrible that he recoiled a little before the sweeping wave of her hand and arm.

"Go," she said. "I have business to-night, and I will not have my footsteps followed. If I see you again—I am in a mood to be dangerous—I shall very probably kill you!"

"Go!" he dared to say. "And leave you to meet him?"

"Ape and ass!" she burst out, advancing against him, with outstretched hands. "Do I look like a woman on a love errand? Go before I do you a mischief." She reovered herself from this burst of passion, and turning, walked away. After traversing a dozen yards or so, she stopped with this warning—"If you follow me, I will kill you."

The time for her encounter with Mark was growing near, and though she had no great opinion of the signor's courage, and believed she had fairly frightened him, there was

still a chance that he might follow her. The deed she had set her mind on would endure no witnesses, and for the misleading of a possible spy, she marched straight past the place of assignation, along the narrow road which led through the copse, and straight on by the fields until she struck the highway to the north of the village. For a time she had disdained to look about her, fancying that Malfi might still have kept her within sight, but now she prospected and the landscape was clear of him. She was strange to the country, but she had kept her bearings well, and now, breaking through a weak place in the hedge, she began to make her way back to the trysting-place. She had scarce retraced a quarter of a mile when she heard a footstep in the road on the other side of the hedge, and peering through the boughs, she became aware that the signor had mustered courage enough to follow. Whether it was at this instant his courage failed him she could not determine, but his steps grew suddenly irresolute and then ceased, so that he stood within five or six yards of her staring at the ground, and after a second's consideration turned on his heel and slowly walked back again. Caterina allowed him to get a start and then followed, keeping to her own side of the hedge, accommodating her pace to his, and walking in stealthy silence.

By and by a hedge barred her way, and she walked along it seeking a place at which it could be got through. The hour of appointment sounded clear and mellow across the fields at this moment. If she were right in her reckoning, she should have been within two or three minutes' walk of the copse, but the height of the mound on which the hedge grew prevented even a glimpse of the country beyond. She found a gap at last and clambered up to it, and there, in the beginning of the twilight, she saw, a single field ahead of her, Tom Carroll sitting upon a stile. She saw him rise and she saw his cousin Mark come forward to meet him. She stood with a branch in either hand, and watched. Neither of them cast a glance that way, and she felt safe from any but the closest observation, standing as she did at one side of the gap, with all the body of the flowering hedge between her and the cousins. But all the petty obstacles that came in between her and that draught of vengeance for which her whole soul thirsted set her heart beating and her nerves quivering with the unsat-

isfied desire of hate. So she watched and waited with savage impatience, but it was not long before she began to be so interested that even hate was content for a few minutes with watching. She was too far away to hear the words they spoke, but the gestures were eloquent enough to supply her with a clew to the character of the conversation, and she was not in the least surprised when she saw Tom's stick lash out at Mark's face. Then her soul was in her eyes as she watched the combat. More than once she felt inclined to dash out, and by one stroke put an end to it, but when the tide of battle turned and Tom began to win, she rejoiced and withheld herself, and watched, and exulted.

The sole witness of the royal thrashing which terminated the scene between Tom and Mark was not aware that she was being watched in turn, but Malfi was glaring at her through the boughs of the hedge in the lane, with the savagery and the cowardice of a wolf. So far as he dared he would find out what she was doing. Once or twice a voice from the fields reached him, and once or twice the sound of blows. His ears were exceptionally quick, and he was almost sure that one of those voices was Mark Carroll's. He had watched for a long time, and the signora had stood upon the bank motionless meanwhile. A firm and heavy footstep had sounded on the road and had started him from his watch, but it had faded out of hearing, and when he went back to the break in the hedge Caterina was still standing there. Two or three minutes later she had melted through the boughs against which she stood (or seemed so to melt, for the evening shades were pretty dense by this time), and after a pause he moved cautiously along on tiptoe until he found a practicable place, and broke silently into the field. Reaching the place on which the signora had been perched, he peered stealthily over the mound, and in a second or two he made out her figure and the figure of a man in the dusky shadow of the copse.

He strained his eyes, but could make out nothing with surety, but his suspicions helped him to something very like a certain belief in the man's identity. Caterina and the man were talking, but, sharp as his ears were, he could make out nothing of their speech. The merest murmur reached him. Hate began to stir in him so strongly that it lent him courage, and he ran crouching back to the road, and then, still crouching, to the copse. Through

this he crawled like a cat, so silently that his progress was scarcely audible to himself, and therefore with great slowness. Now at least he could find out the terms on which Caterina and Mark Carroll met.

The signora had waited at her post of observation until she had seen Mark rise first to his knees and then to his feet. She saw him walk to the stile and lay his hands upon it to steady himself, and then she emerged from her cover and crossed the field. When she came up to him he was breathing hard, and now and then a moan.

"Good-evening, Marco," she said quietly, "I am afraid you are not well."

Mark turned his eyes upon her and groaned a curse. The signora smiled a ghastly smile, and Mark, straightening himself with a prodigious effort, turned and made a step or two away from her. She intercepted him, and they stood face to face again.

"If you have come here," said Mark, in a groaning voice which he could scarcely manage, "in the hope of getting anything out of me, you have your pains for your trouble, and you can go back again."

He stood there straight before her feeble and helpless, and the stiletto was in her right hand beneath her mantle ready for use. She hated him well enough, and half wondered that she did not strike the blow. He had spoken in English, but she answered him in Italian.

"You lied to me long ago, and you determine to end as you began."

"You and that —— cousin of mine," said Mark, pantingly, "come too pat together not to know of each other, I fancy." Such a thrashing as Mark had endured does not tend to clear the wits, but he might have known how baseless that guess was in reality. "That doesn't matter," groaned Mark, "I shall live to pay him, and as for you, you can go to the devil. I've done with you. Go!"

"Where can I go?" she asked. She was determined on the deed, and yet she had loved him once, and if she could have drawn a sign of pity from him, perhaps she might have stayed her hand. She told herself in her thoughts that he should condemn himself by his own mouth. "How can I go?"

"You can go where you like and how you like," said Mark. "Let me get by, and be damned to you!"

If he had tried to harden his heart to the awful task she had set herself, he could scarcely have succeeded better. But she would test him yet. She knew he must wound her to the very quick before she could bear to strike him. Though she meant murder all along, she wanted it to feel like justice.

"You remember all the oaths you swore to me?" she asked him. He waited to pass her, and stood in a sullen rage, with all the flesh of his back and arm burning and stinging and his very bones aching within him. "You remember how you swore, come weal or woe, that you would care for me? You remember all the arts you used?"

There was a little crackle in the undergrowth behind him, but neither of them noticed it.

"Arts?" said Mark. "Let me get by and put an end to this. There were precious few arts needed to catch a bird of your feather, my lady."

"Yet you thought it worth your while to use them," answered Caterina, making one step forward.

Mark broke out with a curse. "Let me by, or — If I lay my hands on you, you'll remember it. Let me get by." She faced him without moving hand or foot. "Let me pass," said Mark, "or I'll throttle you. I never laid my hands on a wanton yet, but—"

He was down with a husky yell, and across his prostrate body Tito Malfi and Caterina were glaring at each other.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When Mark Carroll recovered consciousness he was in bed in his own room in his uncle's house, a nurse was standing at a table, and the face of the chief medico of the county town was bending over him. The wounded man remembered in a flash everything that had happened. He tried to speak, and could not make a sound; but the doctor saw his pale lips move and bent his head to listen. Mark, seeing this, tried again, and just managed to whisper—

"Am I going to die?"

"You must not agitate yourself, Mr. Carroll," said the doctor. Mark's lips formed the words over again. "Everything," said the doctor, "depends upon your own courage and quiet."

Most medical men have a way of pooh-poohing the dread of death in a patient, but this particular man had religious scruples which may not have made him a better doctor, but were matters of stern conscience with him. Mark lay still, comprehending the gravity of the situation. He was too weak for much resolution, but he made up his mind then and there that he would not die if he had any voice in the matter. A man who can find strength to make up his mind upon that question rarely dies, but days passed by before it could be said that Mark was out of danger.

In the meantime Tom had got back to town, burning and occasionally flaming with anger. To have thrashed Mark was no relief to him. He did not desire to thrash him again, but recognized the uselessness of revenge as an anodyne in such a case as this. Perhaps Mark's villainy was phenomenal—at all events his cousin thought it so, and he could never think of it without thinking also of the benefits which he had heaped on Mark in the days of his own prosperity.

He had reached London by a train which left the county town after midnight, and his disordered condition escaped notice at Montague Gardens; but when Baretti saw him next day he had a fine black eye, and his mouth was ludicrously puffed on one side. The knuckles of his right hand were so cut about that he had to wear a glove to conceal the wounds. The painter noticed all these things silently, and waited for Tom to begin his story.

"You were right, Baretti," said the youngster at length. "I don't care to talk about it. I taxed him—something came out down there—and I taxed him with it all. He made no pretense of an excuse, but admitted everything at once. We had a fight, and I thrashed him as long as I could lift my arm. Now let us forget him."

That was more easily said than done, though, in spite of the volcanic rage which sometimes rose within him, he spoke no more of Cousin Mark. The black eye and swollen lip kept him prisoner for some days, and he neglected the daily papers as a rule, otherwise he might have heard curious news. The daily papers throughout England, from the "Times" to the "Mudpool Evening Echo," informed each its section of the public that Mr. Mark Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, had been found lying in one of his uncle's fields within three hundred yards of his uncle's gates, with

signs of terrible violence upon his person, and an ivory-handled dagger of curious design stuck in his breast. Hopes were entertained of the unfortunate gentleman's recovery, and the police had a definite clew to the perpetrator of the crime. In these circumstances it might seem curious that no arrests were made, but after the first day or so the injured gentleman was himself responsible for that fact.

Being supposed by the medical man to be strong enough to be questioned as to the perpetrator of the deed, Mark answered nothing but this—

"Tell me when I am out of danger."

The doctors looked gravely at each other and avoided Mr. Carroll's eye. The whole village of Overhill was absolutely certain as to the personality of the criminal, but by common tacit consent the old man was left to his own guesses. Where his suspicions were cast no man knew for certain, but his plump features wizened, and his rosy cheeks grew white, his proud head drooped, and he walked with a piteous uncertainty for so pompous and lofty a man. Now and then an unconscious groan would escape him, and whilst Mark's fate was uncertain he scarcely eat or drank or slept. All this might grow out of concern for his nephew, but most people fancied that a breath of the popular suspicion had touched him.

Number twenty Montague Crescent was watched night and day, and the police kept a hand above Tom Carroll ready to sweep down on him at any moment. At last the moment came.

Cousin Mark had always been inclined to laugh at the popular cant about conscience; and death-bed repentances had always seemed to his firm and logical mind cowardly and useless. If there were a Deity at all—and Mark took leave to have a doubt upon that question—it must be extremely difficult to hoodwink Him, and He would scarcely think the better of a villain for adding cowardice to his list of vices. Whilst in full possession of health and strength the young man had been a downright atheist, on the grounds of reason and common sense, but now there intruded upon his mind a chilly dread. Suppose he had been wrong after all? This mental condition is common enough in the circumstances, and many divines have built arguments upon it. The existence of the fact proves itself and

nothing more, and Mark's mind, awakened as he was, was quick to see the fallacy of the theologian's trick. "I'm afraid," said Mark to himself. "Well? What does that prove? That I *am* afraid." But for all that he lay for a day or two and faced the one awful mystery which all men have to face in turn, chaste or lascivious, honest or roguish, true or false. The great insoluble, terrible problem stared at him, and he at it, and in spite of his stout unbelief he trembled. For he had a crime in his mind compared with which the peccadilloes of which he had been guilty seemed as nothing, and at this time he quailed before the promptings of his own vengeance. If he had died he would have gone to the grave in silence, with his lips sealed by a fear which he strove in vain to deride as a superstition. But when at the end of five weary days and nights the doctors gave him the assurance that his life was no longer in danger, his courage came back to him. Even then when they renewed their questions, he answered—

"I am not strong enough to speak about it yet. Give me a day or two to grow strong in."

They urged that in the meantime the criminal might escape, but he only shook his head with a very weak smile and declined a verbal answer. So they were compelled to let him alone and to bide his time. In the end he confided in the local doctor.

"Is anybody suspected?" he asked, when the nurse had been turned out of the room and the door had been locked.

"Yes," said the doctor. "There is a very general suspicion."

"If I had died instead of recovering as I have done," said Mark, "it would have been a hanging matter, I suppose?"

"In all probability," the doctor answered.

"That," said Mark, "was why I held my tongue. But, now, I don't think that any mawkish personal consideration ought to operate. Society must be protected." Talking, even now, was a business of some difficulty, and he had to make frequent pauses. "Tell me who is suspected?"

"Your unfortunate cousin," said the surgeon.

"Oh!" said Mark, with a sigh. "Is there any evidence against him?"

The surgeon told the common talk, based on Leggatt's narrative, and swollen a little from its first dimensions.

"Poor Tom!" said Mark. "I never thought his evil passions would have carried him so far. He stabbed his best friend, old fellow, in more senses than one when he stabbed me. I couldn't lie here and think of his going to the gallows over it, and so I thought it best to be quiet. It's an awful scandal. Can't we keep it dark after all? My poor old uncle!—one of the finest fellows in the world! —it will break his heart. Break the news to him gently, Morton. Does he suspect already?"

"We fear so," said the doctor. What a man this Mark Carroll was—the surgeon thought. Lying in the face of death for days and only planning to shield his murderous assailant by silence and to protect the honor of the family. Even now he thought more of his uncle than himself. When Mr. Morton, general practitioner, left Trench House, he eulogized Mark's conduct right and left, and people began to think of him as a quite angelic young man.

But before the doctor left he spoke with Mr. Carroll.

"I have had an interview with your nephew," he began. "I am happy to tell you that he is in a fair way to complete recovery. Most happily the blade missed the vital organ."

"I am glad to know that, sir," said Mr. Carroll. "Extremely glad to know that." The surgeon lingered for a time without saying anything, and the master of the house looked up at him. "Have you anything to add to that communication?"

"I have to perform a task of great difficulty, sir," said the surgeon, tremulously. It falls to the lot of a doctor to break bad news oftener, perhaps, than to the lot of any other man in the world, but Mr. Morton was not old, and his present task was unlike any in his experience, and looked dreadful. "Your nephew has confided to me the secret he has kept since the night of the attempt upon his life. He has requested me to—"

"You may speak out plainly, sir," said Carroll, drawing himself to his old height, and looking the surgeon in the face. "In a word—he accuses—whom?"

"Your son, sir," answered the surgeon. Mr. Carroll inclined his head in stern self-government and assent.

"I was not unprepared for such a revelation," he

answered. His features twitched and quivered, and everything in the room was gray to him as if a sudden fog had spread about him, but he stood upright and took the blow like a man. He had given up loving Tom a long time ago. It had been a long time since he had loved anybody, but his family pride, like his personal pride, had been prodigious. The certainty which now followed on suspicion crushed that pride, and crushed him with it, but he was resolute to conceal his anguish, and to play the Spartan. People had always had a right to admire him and wonder at him. They should have it still.

He unlocked a private drawer and took from it a paper, upon which he wrote the day of the month. It was a printed form, otherwise filled in already at the blank places, and he read the whole thing through whilst the surgeon stood looking on in amazement at his stoicism. Carroll held a quill pen in his hand, and this went hovering above the lines as he read them. The hand looked steady, but the quivering plume told how tense the nerves were, and by what an intense effort the palsied shaking was suppressed. When the wretched father had read through the document, he took up an unneeded piece of blotting-paper and dabbed at the words he had written a minute or two before, though they were as dry as the rest.

"I shall do my duty, sir," he said, turning round upon his companion. The doctor saw that his eyes were bloodshot, though a minute or two before they had been clear. "This is a warrant for the apprehension of Thomas Carroll on a charge of attempted murder. Cutting and wounding with intent to do bodily harm, is the legal phrase employed. I shall do my duty. Oblige me by ringing the bell, if you please, sir."

The surgeon obeyed without moving his eyes from Carroll's face.

"I shall do my duty," said the miserable man again. He spoke like an automaton. A servant appearing in answer to the summons, he turned his bloodshot eyes upon him, and with the same unnatural voice and manner said, "Tell John Hard to get the dog-cart ready and then come to me." The man bowed and disappeared. "I shall do my duty."

He folded the warrant and put it in an envelope, the paper rustling noisily in the silence of the room. In

answer to a tap at the door he cried, "Come in," and the servant re-entered. "Well?" inquired his master.

"You told me to come to you, sir, when I had given Hard your orders."

"I told you to send Hard to me," returned Mr. Carroll, with frosty majesty, "when he had got the dog-cart ready."

"I beg your pardon, sir." The servant retired again, closing the door noiselessly.

"I shall do my duty," said the master of the house for the fourth time. The persistent iterance of this phrase alarmed the surgeon as much as the blood-shot eyes, the swollen veins in the temples, and the palsied rustling of the paper in a hand that looked as steady as a rock. "Pray direct this envelope for me, Mr. Morton," said Carroll, after a pause. "Mr. Superintendent Lewis, Police Station, Fernock."

The surgeon with a shaky hand wrote down the address dictated, and for a minute or two there was silence. It seemed a long time before the groom came to take the letter.

"Drive with this to Fernock with all possible speed," said Mr. Carroll. The groom took it and withdrew. "I have done my duty," said the wretched man, and at that moment the doctor ran forward and caught him in his arms.

There was no necessity for alarming the house, and the surgeon's nerves were tranquil and his brain cool again now that he had work to do. Bodily agony—bodily trouble of any sort—was a thing he had ceased to be afraid of, but the mental pain he had inflicted was more than he could easily endure to look at. He took off the patient's stiff and old-fashioned satin stock, opened his collar, laid his head back, and sprinkled his face with cold water. It was perhaps as well for Mr. Carroll that he had fainted. A little more of that pretended stoicism, and it might have ended in apoplexy, for he had a tendency that way.

He came round in time and sat up weak and quivering. An hour went by before the surgeon thought it safe to leave him, and then the news of Mark's declaration went through the village like wild-fire.

Mark himself had had plenty of time to weigh the *pros* and *cons* before he finally decided upon this wicked lie of his. There were many cogent reasons in its favor. For

one thing, Tom had given him such a thrashing as mortal man rarely receives, and Mark wanted revenge for it. Again, to mention the signora would be to provoke inquiry as to his past relations with that young person, and to have her arrested would be to publish in an assize court a statement about himself which would infallibly ruin him with his uncle. He would have liked to be revenged upon the signora also, but that could wait. One thing at a time. He could pay Tom for that tremendous hiding with which his bones yet ached, and at the same move he could get rid of him as a rival for the Trench House estates at once and forever.

Whilst he had the fear of death before his eyes, he could not find courage for his supreme rascality, but now that he was safe, he could survey it calmly and quietly enough. The prospect of such a vengeance as he planned would have excited some people, and have retarded recovery; Mark took it tranquilly. It soothed him to think of it, and he began to mend rapidly.

Mr. Superintendent Lewis, happening to be within when John Hard arrived with Mr. Carroll's missive, opened it at once, cast his eye over it, put it in his pocket-book, instructed his wife to pack his portmanteau, and set out by the next train for London. He arrived there in the early evening, announced himself at Scotland Yard, and in company with a town officer, drove in a four-wheeled cab to Montague Gardens. The cabman, pursuant to instructions, pulled up at Number Twenty, and the two alighted.

Mr. Superintendent Lewis rang the bell.

"Does Mr. Carroll live here, my dear?"

The two officers were in plain clothes, and the girl fired up at the address.

"Don't my dear me, if you please," she said. "What do you want with Mr. Carroll? What name?"

Mr. Superintendent Lewis walked in. The London officer followed, closing the door behind him.

"Sorry to bring unpleasant news," said the superintendent. "We are officers of the law, my dear, and I have a warrant for Mr. Carroll's apprehension."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the girl, trembling. There was not a creature in the house by whom Tom Carroll was not beloved.

"Here's my authority," said the official, calmly. "Show us up, there's a good girl, and let us have it over."

The girl held on to the stair-rail for a moment, and then, rallying her forces, led the way. She indicated the door, and the superintendent tapped at it. Tom Carroll's voice called "Come in," and the two men entered. Tom and Baretti were sitting on opposite sides of the fire.

"Mr. Carroll?" said the superintendent, looking inquiringly from one to the other.

"Well?" asked Tom, rising.

"It is my duty to arrest you, sir," said the officer, "on a charge of maliciously wounding with intent. I hope you'll come quietly."

"Maliciously wounding?" cried Tom. "Maliciously wounding whom?"

"Mr. Mark Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, on the evening of the twenty-ninth ult.," responded the officer. "My name's Lewis—Superintendent Lewis, of Fernock. This gentleman is from Scotland Yard." Tom and Baretti were staring at each other. "I should advise you to say nothing at present," added the officer, in obedience to instructions for such cases made and provided. "You may make any statement you like, but it is my duty to tell you that anything you say will be taken down and used against you on your trial."

"Maliciously wounding?" said Tom again. "They can't define *that* as maliciously wounding."

"Well, I don't know, sir," returned the superintendent using a toothpick with great *sang froid*, but keeping a careful eye upon his man. "Six inches of cold steel into him."

"What?" cried the prisoner, with face and voice of horror and amazement.

"Found at 9:10 on the evening of the twenty-ninth ult.," said the officer, quietly, "at the edge of Marston's Spinney, at Overhill, with the blade of an ivory-handled dagger sticking in him."

"Who accuses me?" asked Tom.

"I don't rightly know," returned the superintendent, "but I suppose it's the gentleman himself."

"Carroll," cried Baretti, "you are innocent. Tell me you are innocent."

"Yes," said Tom. "I am innocent."

"I hope you'll prove it so at the proper quarter," said Mr. Lewis, tranquilly polite. "I must trouble you to come, sir, if you please. You'll want to take a few things with you, perhaps. I dare say the young woman we saw outside could pack you a handbag or something of that kind."

"I will do it," said Baretti, and he went into the next room with his head whirling. Was Tom guilty? It would be miserable if he were, but to Baretti's mind by no means unnatural. The painter was as tender-hearted a little man as any in the world, but he would have dreaded the temptation of standing before Mark Carrol with a dagger ready to his own hand. He had seen Tom enraged once, and he remembered now how his nature had seemed to change with the passion of his anger. The officer from Scotland Yard looked in to hurry the process of packing, and found Baretti sitting on the edge of the bed the picture of bewilderment and misery.

"I'll give the gentleman a helping hand," he said to his *confrére*, and then advancing, "Come, come, sir," he added to Baretti, "this won't do no good. Point out to me what to take, and I'll put the things up."

Baretti half mechanically threw open a wardrobe and began to lay out linen and underclothing. Next he found a small portmanteau, and the official began to pack the things neatly into it.

"You will want your dressing-case, Carroll?" asked Baretti, through the open door-way.

"Yes," said Tom, mechanically.

Baretti produced it, and the man looked into it, and shook his head at the razors.

"All right," he said, fastening the case with a snap, "they'll take care of 'em at the station. That all, sir? Come along." He carried the things into the next room, and set them down in an arm-chair.

"Carroll," cried the painter, darting at his friend and seizing him by both arms, "can you recall everything that took place that night? Are you sure of everything?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I am sure of everything."

"And you used no weapon?"

"I broke my walking-stick over him," cried Tom, with some of the old rage rising in his cheek and glittering in his eye, "but I used no other weapon."

"He harmed another man as much as you, or nearly," said Baretti. "Carroll! I see Malfi's hand in this."

"I would say no more if I were in your place, sir," said the superintendent. "Time's precious, too, and I must ask you to come along."

"May I come with you?" asked Baretti.

"That's as you like," returned the officer. "But you can do no good, so far as I can see."

Baretti's mention of Malfi had set Tom thinking.

"Baretti," he said suddenly, "the signora was there that day. Trace her if you can. My hands are tied. I can do nothing. I am in deep waters, Baretti. Help me."

"I would lay down my life for you," said Baretti, with tears in his eyes at this appeal. "Fear nothing, Carroll. I will be cunning in your cause, and strong and untiring. I told you that one day I would repay you. By God's help, Carroll, I will pay you now."

The two wrung each other hard by both hands, and the superintendent stepped between them with a something that clattered a little and glittered in the lamplight.

"Is that necessary?" asked Tom. "I will go quietly."

"Very well, sir," said the officer, "I am willing to make things as pleasant as I can." He signed to Baretti, "Do you mind carrying those things down, sir? You'll find a four-wheeler at the door. Now, sir," to Tom, "if you'll allow this gentleman your arm I'll take the other."

Baretti took up his wideawake hat and put it on, then took up the portmanteau and the dressing-case and walked down-stairs. The maid, the landlady, and her husband were standing beneath the lamp in the hall. The girl opened the door for him and whispered as he passed,

"Is it true, sir? Is Mr. Carroll arrested?"

He nodded gloomily and passed on. A moment later the two officers with their captive arm-in-arm between them came somewhat clumsily down the stairs, which were not quite wide enough for a procession so arranged. The landlady burst into tears at the sight, and wrung her hands. She knew of Tom's monetary misfortunes, at least in part, by this time.

"Oh! Mr. Carroll, sir, what is it? If it's money, sir,

here's Walker ready, sir, if it's a bill of sale on the very furniture."

"That's extremely good of *you*, ma'am," said the superintendent, "but it isn't money. Let us get away, ma'am, if you please."

The two hurried Tom into the cab, and Baretti followed. Not a word was spoken by the way, but at the police station the friends were parted.

"Trace Signor Malfi," were Tom's last words to him.

"Carroll," cried the painter, "I *will* leave no stone unturned. Good-bye. Be brave." Tom went quietly away with a policeman in his rear, and Baretti, half blinded with tears, walked into the street. "I will save you," he said. "I will save you. Best of friends, best of men, unhappiest, I will save you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE signora was back in London, and had brought with her the ghost she dreaded. All day long and all night long she struck the blow over again, and Mark's husky shriek answered it, his body fell at her feet, and Malfi glared into her eyes across it. The blow, the cry, the fall, the glance followed each other without pause or break, whether she were in the streets amongst the grinding noises of the town or in her own chamber with all sounds locked out. Whether she read, sewed, walked, eat, slept, it was all one. She struck the blow, Mark shrieked and dropped, and she was staring at Malfi. It had all been done in three seconds, and every three seconds did it over again. She was not sorry, she was not afraid, or softened, but the burden of this continued iteration was tremendous and scarcely to be borne. The constant series of recurring images and sound did not shut out thought, or, in any way, beyond its awful grating on the nerves, unfit her for the common uses of life.

Malfi fled and she followed him. He would have distanced her and got clear away, but for a heavy tumble in the first score of yards. When she came up with him he was half dead with terror until he saw that her hands were empty, and even then he knelt quaking in the grass, with his clasped hands quivering before him.

"Get up, coward!" she said, disdainfully. "Are you jealous now?"

"You have killed him," gasped Signor Malfi.

"Hold your tongue," said the signora. "You are no safer than I am. I swear that if you do not help me away I will charge you with the crime. You came prepared to kill him. You threatened him in my hearing. Give me what money you have and let me go."

He shook before her and implored her incoherently whilst he fumbled in his pockets. It was perfectly true that he had thought himself ripe for murder, but then he had never looked at it. To have stood by, to have seen the blow and heard the yell that answered it, and then to have caught those eyes with murder in them suddenly fixed on his—all this was experience, and his ideas of himself under such conditions had been merely theoretical hitherto. The signora's threat terrified him, and he knew her now as being capable of anything.

"Let me keep a little to get away with," he implored her, holding out in one shaky hand a purse and a handful of jingling silver in the other. Caterina took the purse.

"We are safest apart," she said. "Take your way, and I will take mine."

With that she turned and walked swiftly away, and it was at that moment she began to strike the blow and hear the cry again. She found a road and followed it, hiding once or twice at the sound of footsteps. At the end of five miles she found a railway station and took train for London. She had an hour or two to wait in the county town, and the train which carried Tom Carroll bore her also. At the terminus she saw him alight, and she lingered until he had gone lest she should be seen and recognized. She took a room in an Italian coffee-house, and lived there for days. Signor Malfi's purse was well stocked, and she was provided for for many weeks to come.

Tom Carroll never saw the daily papers, but the signora began to spell them through with great eagerness on the morning of her return to town. On the first day the journal was dumb on the matter in which she was interested. On the morning of the second day, she learned that Mr. Mark Carroll, nephew of Mr. Thomas Carroll, J.P., of Trench House, Overhill, had been stabbed and lay in a precarious condition. She learned also that the police had

a clew, and this, since she was ignorant of the ways of British police and British journals, alarmed her as it would have alarmed no practical criminal. She half decided on flight, but lay still, partly through fear of the danger of running away. Every morning she spelled through her daily paper until she found the thing she looked for, and at last she learned that her victim was on the way to recovery, and had accused his cousin, who was under arrest for attempted murder. This presented no puzzle to the signora, who had had so much experience of the yearning for revenge that she could understand its operations in other people. She recognized a sort of mastery of generalship in the maneuver. Mark would crush his cousin that way, and would seat himself more firmly than ever on his throne at Overhill, and he would get besides a full revenge for the thrashing Tom had given him. He despised her for the meantime, and could afford to forego one revenge to feed upon another. She would rather that he had turned and struck at her. She had loved him, she had hated him, she had tried to kill him. In answer he ignored her, and that was tenfold more hateful than any revenge he could have taken.

She was not sorry that he was alive. When you hate, as the signora hated, you create an unbearable blank in life by removing the object of your passion. She had him still to hate, and that was something. To have killed him every day would have been a regal pleasure, but you can not have your cake and eat it, often. For once she had tasted vengeance, and it was in her power to taste it again. How to get at it?

Her own instinct told her, but she feared the road. Sampson (though the signora knew nothing of that history) crushed himself to kill his enemies. Her rage led her that way, but as yet it was hardly strong enough, and the time was not yet ripe. She would wait and see.

She lay close, therefore, and every day she spelled through her copy of the morning paper, until at last she lighted on the thing she sought. Tom Carroll had undergone his first examination, had denied the charge, and had been remanded without bail. When the signora could not understand a word, she asked the people at her lodging-house and had it explained, a course which made it manifest that she took strong interest either in general or particular police pro-

ceedings. Perhaps it was not an uncommon symptom there, but nobody seemed greatly to notice it. The days went on, and Mr. Mark Carroll was sufficiently recovered from the effects of the murderous attack made upon him by the defendant to appear in court, where he swore that it was his cousin's hand, and no other, which struck the blow. The signora read, though she attached no significance to the statement, that Mr. Lording was in court. The prisoner was defended, but called no witnesses. The testimony of the prosecutor remained unshaken—the prisoner was formally committed to take his trial, and bail was refused. Mark was on his way to a perfect triumph. The signora was on the way to vengeance, but at every step she counted the cost and trembled. None the less she was on the way.

Baretti was not idle all this time, but his hands were tied, and he could do nothing that seemed to be of use. He went down to Overhill and made inquiries in person, and thereby discovered that two people answering to the description of Signor Malfi and the signora had been in the village on the day of the attack. He engaged privately the services of the police, and set one or two active men to look for Tito and Caterina, and, in that way, spent a good deal of money to no purpose. When the authorities allowed of it he saw Tom Carroll and tried to cheer him, but he found that work too heavy for his own foreboding heart. The passion of his love and gratitude for his preserver had come back in full tide upon him, and whilst these troublous times endured Tom was of more value to him even than his love.

"I will be loyal," he would say to himself at times. "I *will* be loyal. I *will* be loyal." It was not his fault that the devil tempted him with visions of Tom Carroll's last chance of Mary's love destroyed. The temptation only made him loathe himself. It never shook him for a single instant; its baseness was too open and too palpable.

The time of the trial drew near, and he had as yet done nothing of real service to his friend. He was abroad in the streets of London, wandering miserably in the early night-time, when the lamps were newly lighted and the town was like a dream. He had walked for some hours, not caring in what direction his unguided footsteps led him, and standing suddenly still to look about him, he found

that he had walked beyond his own knowledge, and was in a part of the city which was strange to him. A figure fluttered across the street out of shadow into light, and swiftly out of light into shadow again. It came dimly to his mind that this had happened once or twice before, but he was in a condition altogether dream-like, and many sleepless nights had combined with his anxieties to drug intelligence. It did not seem worth while to ask his way. He was likely enough to come on a place he knew by and by, or if he did not he was in no hurry to get home, and a hansom cab was always to be found. His unconscious footsteps took him on again, and a singular half-consciousness grew upon him (as it grows upon us in our dreams) that something near at hand was following and tracking him. This fancy developing quite suddenly into a fear, he turned short round, and a figure fluttered into the dark behind him, but not before an almost certain recognition had set his heart beating. He ran in the direction of the flying figure, and now every nerve in his body was alert. It amazed him when the fugitive stopped suddenly and faced him beneath a gas-lamp. He paused before her panting (not with the chase, for that was too brief to have put him out of breath), and seized the signora by both wrists. She made no effort to remove his hold, but stood panting back at him, though he knew that (when he had time to think about it afterward) more from the look upon her face than any other sign he noticed.

"We have met at last," she said, in her own language. "I have followed you many times in the street, but I have not dared to speak to you. We have met at last, and I must tell you." Then she looked first downward at the hands that held her, and then at her captor's face, with a glance of strange inquiry. "Why do you hold me?"

"I charge you," said Baretti, in a voice so husky that he could scarcely make himself heard, "I charge you with the attempted murder of Mark Carroll."

The lids of her great black eyes drew together, and she looked at him through half-closed lashes. "You do not charge me," she said, and then in a second, with a gesture of both hands which freed them from Baretti's grasp, "I charge myself. I am my own accuser." Her eyes flashed wide again as she spoke, and her bosom rose with a single tempestuous heave. "Come," she said, "where I can

talk with you. I have followed you for days to tell you, but I could never find the courage until now."

"Come to the nearest police-station," said Baretti, quietly.

"No," she answered, with a noticeable smile. "Not there. Why need you grudge me a few words? Can I outrun you even if I were to try? The first policeman we pass would take your word against me. I can do better for you, better for your friend, and better for myself if you will follow my way. Take me to some place where I can talk with you."

The city street was empty, and so silent in its deserted state that the tread of a policeman in one of the roads which led out of it was heard distinctly.

"Walk on before me," said Baretti.

"I beg of you, I pray of you," she answered, "that you will hear me first. I can not bargain with you, because any policeman will take your word against me. Do not refuse me."

"I will hear you," said Baretti. "Walk on before me."

She walked on without a word, and the painter followed a yard or two behind. They came in a while to streets which at that hour were more frequented, and by and by a hansom crawled in sight. Baretti hailed it, the signora at his signal entered, and the cabman having received instructions, drove to Montague Gardens. Not a word was exchanged until the cab drew up, when Baretti took Caterina by the arm to secure her.

"You are wasting trouble," she said then. "How can I run away? I do not wish to run away. I followed you for days to speak to you."

At that he released her, but kept a wary eye for her whilst he paid the man his fare and whilst afterward he unlocked the door. Caterina stood on the pavement like a statue, and never moved until he motioned to her to enter. Then she walked forward tranquilly, and at his bidding ascended the stairs. His own room reached, he turned up the lamps that glimmered feebly on the mantel-shelf, and faced his guest.

"What have you to say to me?" he demanded.

"I have to say in the first place," she answered, "that it was I who tried to kill your friend's cousin. When the

right time comes I am willing to tell the whole world, but not before."

The signora was a handsome woman in her way, and at this moment, with her southern eyes on fire and her southern cheeks all pale, her lovely bosom heaving and falling, and her large white hands clutched across it as if to keep it still, she looked beautiful and terrible. Baretti faced her in a suppressed excitement almost equaling her own.

"Let me tell you everything," she went on, "and then you will understand. I was never Tito's wife, and I never cared for him very much. He was a poor thing, but in his way he loved me, and I was content to go on with him until the day when we both met you close at hand here, when you and Marco and his cousin were together. You remember?"

"I remember."

"You left Marco with us to do some little business for Tito who could not speak English. You remember?"

"I remember," he said again.

"We met often after that, Marco and I," she went on, "and by and by he began to make love to me, and I began to listen to him and believe him. You do not know what my life has been, Signor Baretti, and I do not wish to tell you. But I had never cared for a man before, and he made me love him. He promised me that he would take care of me as long as I lived and he lived. I did not ask him to marry me, for I would have been contented—" The heaving breast, clinched hands, and burning eyes filled in the pause. "I loved him," she went on. "I would have died for him. I would have followed him barefooted round the world, begging my bread, to see him once a day. Well, he got tired of me, and Tito suspected, and went to his rooms one night when I was there. He hid me until Tito had gone, and then he told me I might go also. I had loved him like a dog, and he sent me away like a dog. I saw then what manner of a man I had loved, and he sent me into the street knowing that I should be homeless there. Well, I can hate as well as I can love, and after a long time I made up my mind that I would kill him. Then that looked too terrible."

She paused again, and Baretti was still silent.

"He had been so base," she pursued, "that a mean revenge seemed to suit my hatred of him. His cousin, who

is a stupid good young man, your friend, had been cast away by his father, and I have found out why, because I was there at the Concert Hall when the thing happened. I thought if his father is so severely good as to cast off his own son for nothing, what will he do with Marco when he knows the truth about him? So I went to expose Marco."

She tired to moisten her dry lips with a tongue as dry as themselves, and Baretti poured out a glass of wine from a decanter on the table, and pushed it across to her. She took it with an inclination of the head, drank it off, and set down the glass.

"I met him near his uncle's house, and I told him why I was there. He laughed at me, and jeered me. 'You,' he said, 'are the cast-off mistress of my cousin, and you are here to try to wreck my fortunes. But nobody will believe you, and everybody will believe me. Go home again. I will not be hard with you. Meet me at evening, and I will give you money to go back with.' I had told him I had no money, and could not return. I bade him farewell for the time, and I went away desperate, having but one road to my revenge left open. I looked at my stiletto often that afternoon, but I should not have used it if it had not been— He spoke words to me which nobody but a hound uses. I saw your friend meet him whilst I waited. I saw your friend flog him like a slave."

She enjoyed this recollection even now, terrible as the moment was, and Baretti saw as much.

"They fought at first, but Marco was beaten, and the poor innocent acted like a man. When he had broken his stick he left off and went away. Then it became my turn, and I went up and spoke to Marco. Up till then I had been hidden, and neither of them had seen me. I need not tell you what happened then. Even then, if he had cared to be kind, I could not have struck him. I thought he was dead when I came away."

Her bosom heaving with a slow tempestuous swell, she stood silent, and at length Baretti was constrained to speak.

"All this is what I knew or guessed before. If you have nothing more to tell me, I must give you up at once to justice. For me," he added, with a momentary flash in his black eyes, "you might go free as air, but I have my friend to save and his enemy to punish."

"His enemy to punish!" cried the woman, in a passion

so sudden and vivid that he started at it as he might have done at a flash of lightning. "His punishment is in my hands." She cooled again. "Why have I stayed in England, do you think, Signor Baretti?" He could have answered that question from the tone in which she put it, and the fire that gleamed in her eyes. "I could have been away safe from pursuit long ago, for Tito had given me money, and nobody at first suspected me. Why did I follow you day after day? Do you think I do not know what I am going to? I will tell you, signor, why I stayed. When I found he was not dead, I saw that I had not thrown away all my revenge for a minute's rage. I know why he charged his cousin with the crime. It is his last blow to crush him, and he thinks that he himself is safe. Now I wait—for what? To hear him speak his lie before the whole world, and when his lie has triumphed to stand up there and drag him down with it and ruin him."

"He has deserved all that," said Baretti, half to himself, "and more."

"Yes," she answered, calm and quiet again, "he has deserved it."

The painter threw himself into a chair and reviewed the situation. The signora, uninvited, poured out and drank a second glass of wine, and then bestowed herself upon a sofa. Baretti, looking once or twice to where she sat in shadow, could see her eyes gleaming, though he could not make out another feature of her face.

"You are sure," he said, rising and confronting her after a lengthy pause, "that you are strong enough in your resolution to carry it to the end?"

"I am sure of that," she answered.

"I am not sure," said Baretti.

"If you knew how to hate," returned the lady, placidly enough, "you would be."

"Possibly," returned the painter. "You will understand, signora, that I have no personal quarrel with you. If Mr. Mark Carroll had died, and my friend had been in danger, I should see you hanged to release him very gladly, but otherwise I should not have been sorry to see you escape, and, knowing what I know, might even have been tempted to assist you. I am sorry to incommode you, but I distrust your resolution, and if I refrain from giving you up to the proper authorities at once, I must at least see

you in safe keeping. A very excellent person happens to be known to me, the wife of an English officer of police. She is a person of resolution and courage equal to your own, and I think I may intrust you to her keeping. I am afraid you must consent to be locked up in the interim. Or better still—I had an interview with Mr. Thomas Carroll's lawyer this afternoon, and learned from him that he would be at his offices until long past the present hour. We will consult him, and we will be bound by his advice."

"I will go anywhere, and do anything," said the signora, rising and drawing her mantle about her, "if you will promise me one thing. Signor, I am in your power, and I can not make conditions. I can only beg. Do not rob me of this one thing. Let Marco accuse his cousin before he knows that I am ready to deny him."

"I think we can secure so much for you, signora," said Baretti. "In the meantime will you accompany me?"

He turned down the lamps again, and he and the signora left the house together unobserved. Baretti's heart beat high with triumph, and the vengeance the signora proposed to take upon Mark seemed to him—for he, though a high-minded and most chivalrous person in most things, was not a finished Christian—suitable and befitting. For the present at least, he had no fear of Caterina's resolution, and no doubt of the honesty of her professions. He drove her to the offices of the man of law who had Tom Carroll's case in charge, and for once in his life an old criminal solicitor confessed himself amazed.

The criminal solicitor, whose name was Cohen, had an eagle beak and an eagle eye. He was not a finished Christian any more than Baretti, and when once he had grasped the story, he hailed the chance for a grand theatrical coup such as it offered with much gratification.

"Does the young woman speak English?" he asked, turning an admiring eye on the signora, who sat in a dusky corner of his room. "Women, Mr. Baretti, are not to be handled like men, and I entirely agree with you that this young person should be taken care of until the time arrives at which we can make use of her evidence. In the meantime we had better take her whilst she is in the mind, and make her sign a statement. Wait a moment."

He wrote busily for a minute, and having finished, threw the sheet of foolscap over the table to Baretti.

"Oblige me by turning that into Italian, Mr. Baretti. I have one or two things to look at in the meantime."

Baretti read through the document.

"I —— the undersigned, hereby make confession that on the 29th September last I stabbed Mark Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, in the County of Worcester. I declare that I was a witness of the interview between the said Mark Carroll and his cousin Thomas Carroll, of Number Twenty, Montague Gardens, London, West, at Overhill, on the twenty-ninth September last, as aforesaid, and that no knife was used in the conflict between them. As witness my hand."

When Baretti had translated this into Italian, the solicitor took the translation and rapidly wrote below it the original English, leaving a wide space between.

"Let her sign," he said, casting the sheet once more across the table, and the signora, marching in outward tranquillity to the table, signed, with a firm hand, after reading the document, and resumed her seat. "Now, Mr. Baretti," said the lawyer, "write, 'I declare this to be a fair and just translation of the foregoing.' Thank you. Will you ask the young woman if she is willing to submit herself to my care during the next two or three days? I shall keep her under lock and key and intrust her to my housekeeper. Tell her that if you please."

"I understand," said the signora in English. "I shall not change my mind."

"Very well, my dear," said Cohen, who was a man of phlegm. "You will keep your counsel, Mr. Baretti. We seem to have to deal with a very ready and unscrupulous scoundrel, but I think we shall hoist him this time. You may leave the lady in my care."

"I may let my friend know that he is safe?" asked Baretti.

"Oh, yes," returned the solicitor. "Ease his mind, poor fellow. But don't let him blab, even to a warder. It's a great case. I shall come down to Worcester myself personally. I am busy, but I can't afford to miss a thing like this. One moment before you go, Mr. Baretti. There is a public-house at the corner. This document is not yet witnessed, and the landlord has obliged me once or twice before. Will you kindly ask him to step this way? Thank you."

Baretti was in the street in a moment thanking God with an uplifted heart for his friend's deliverance. The signora was out of his thoughts for the time, and it was enough for him to think just then that Tom Carroll was already virtually a free man, and that the just punishment of Mark's villainy was creeping nearer and nearer. The landlord of the corner public-house did not seem in the least degree to be surprised at the request Baretti had to proffer, but got into his coat at once and crossed to the office.

"Put your hand to this, Mr. Slape," said the criminal solicitor. The landlord signed. "Thank you. Good-evening." And the man was gone. "Odd fellow that, Mr. Baretti," said the lawyer, with a laugh. "There's scarcely a document in the world that man will sign without consulting me, unless it's a receipt for money paid to him, but I believe—in fact I know—that he would sign this confession in his own name if I asked him to do it. Here's my name as witness number two, and now the thing's complete. Good night, Mr. Baretti. Rely on me to produce the lady at the proper time and place."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Mr. Carroll, however disposed to play the Spartan father, was not equal to an attendance at the County Assizes, though, if he had been called as a member of the Grand Jury, he had strung himself up to go and do his duty. It is not worth while to examine too closely into human motives. The precise compound of foolish pride and stubborn courage which supported him at this crisis have enabled passably great men to do really great things, and will again. Mr. Carroll set his whole soul on the accomplishment of one impossibility. He tried his hardest, whilst his only son awaited his trial for attempted murder, to behave as if nothing extraordinary were happening. He failed, of course, and people sympathized with him in proportion with his effort and his failure.

One thing, at least, he contrived to do. He attended to business precisely as of old—missed no engagement, muddled no bargain.

On the very morning of the trial he addressed his nephew:

"Nephew Mark. You will have occasion to be in town to-day. Make a deposit for me, if you please, at the County Bank. If you cast your eye over the papers here, you will understand everything."

Mark bowed sympathetically, and took the papers indicated. Mr. Carroll retired to his own room and bore his miseries in secret, whilst his nephew made his simple preparations for the brief journey before him. Mark's occasional ventures abroad since his disaster had been accompanied by much curious sympathy, and now almost everybody in the village found casual business on the road between Trench House and Overhill railway-station, or on the platform itself. He rode down to the station in a closed carriage, and the station-master found him a private room on his arrival. When the train drew up to the platform the local policeman and the porter (temporarily sent down to supply the place of the official who had to give evidence of the discovery of the wounded man) had much ado to clear a line for Mark to the door of the first-class compartment reserved for him. Hats went off on all sides amid a subdued respectful murmur. "Glad to see you about again, sir," "Glad to see him about again," "Doan't he look pale, poor feller," and the like. "Poor Master Thomas," said one, whom Mark overheard. "He *have* brought his pigs to a pretty market, haven't he?"

This was a foretaste of what was going to happen all his life long in the future. Mark was resolved on being a popular landlord when he came to his own, and he was starting with the sympathy and approbation of everybody in the district. Things had happened very fortunately for him, and he was willing to admit to himself that nothing could have chanced more luckily than that Caterina should turn up on the night of Tom's revenge, and thus give the doubly assailed one his only chance of repaying the assailed. Mark had a faculty which is sometimes erroneously supposed to belong to sympathetic people: he could project himself pretty fairly into another man's mind, and could partly tell what was going on there under given conditions. He would, in some degree, comprehend the rage and wonder in Tom's heart at this accusation of his, and he could look at the whole matter from all the points he knew of without prejudice. Conscience was silent. Conscience is the monitor of failure. It is the defeated rascal

whose heart is gnawn by the keen truth of her reproach, not the prosperous. Nor did he hate Tom overmuch after all, in spite of the wrong he had done and the wrong he meant to do him. Tom was in his way, and must be put out of it. Mark was pleased and soothed by the sense of his own mastery of the situation, and the state of his mind might fairly be described as judicial, with this understanding—that whatever was good for Mark Carroll was just.

As he rode along he examined the papers his uncle had intrusted to his care. It was not disagreeable for the heir expectant to discover that he held between two and three thousand pounds in his fingers. Lately he was beginning to know pretty well what his uncle was worth, and the knowledge was satisfactory. The substantial lump he had now in his possession felt absolutely like his own. He smiled to think that at one time not very distant he might have been tempted to run away with so large a sum. There was no temptation now. There was nothing to run away from, nothing to run away to. He had everything he hoped for—money, luxury, social state, and the power to crush his sole rival.

One of the Trench House servants rode in the same train, and on his arrival at the county town stepped forward and secured a conveyance for him. Mark drove at once to the Assize-court, where a seat was found for him. It is not often that the county has the luck to listen to such a case as the great Carroll scandal, and, as a matter of course, the house was filled. Mark was still a trifle pale, and was generally considered to look "interesting." The county ladies were present in shoals, and their pretty toilets lit up the dingy old building until it looked like a flower show. They leveled their opera-glasses at the prosecutor in this most attractive case, and most of them admired him. It may be confessed that Mark's demeanor was almost perfect, the dominant feature thereof being a manly seriousness as of one who knew the terrible character of the day, but was calmly possessed of himself and tranquilly to do his duty.

The case before the jury when Mark entered was one of arson, an unusual crime in that peaceful district, and one which in other circumstances would have been watched with great interest. Now nobody listened to it, and the very gentlemen of the jury had but one eye apiece for the

witnesses and reserved the other for Mark Carroll. The case against the incendiary was as clear as day, and an hour or two after the opening of the court a verdict of "guilty" was returned. The man was sentenced and led away amidst a stir and buzz, which referred, not to him, but to the great case of the Assize, now approaching.

Wigged heads went together in the well of the court, and papers were rustled to and fro on the table. The judge laid by his notes of the arson case, and tried a new quill on his thumb-nail. There was everywhere a little audible flutter, and with all necks craned and all eyes strained to look at him the prisoner walked into the dock. He bowed to the judge, and then with both hands on the rail he scanned the court. At first he was so absorbed in looking for Baretti that he had no time to notice how everybody was staring at him, but when he had once found his friend and exchanged glances with him, the knowledge that he was there as a sort of raree show came home to him, and he had to bear it as best he could. There was comfort in Baretti's look which was undisguisedly triumphant.

The Clerk of Arraigns challenged the prisoner in the old legal jargon, the prisoner pleaded "not guilty." Counsel in a score or two dry sentences expounded the charge, and the play began.

Henry Leggatt, in answer to the gentle leading of the counsel for the Crown, deposed that he was station-master at Overhill. That he was well acquainted with the prisoner. That on the night of the 29th of September last, he saw the prisoner at the railway station at Overhill, his clothes being at that time strangely disordered, and his hands and the wristbands of his shirt covered with blood. That the prisoner directed him to Marston's Spinney to look for Mr. Mark Carroll, who might be in need of assistance, stating that he (prisoner) had half killed him. That witness, in company with Philip Piggott, railway porter, obeyed the instructions of the prisoner, and on arriving at Marston's Spinney, found many evidences of a severe struggle, and at last, being guided by his groanings, discovered Mr. Mark Carroll with the ivory handle of a dagger sticking out of him. (Dagger produced and identified.) That Dr. Marks being summoned came at once, accompanied by Dr. Morton, and the injured man was conveyed to Trench House.

Cross-examined: Remembered distinctly that a foreign-looking woman arrived by train at Overhill on the morning of the day in question. Remembered to have seen her and Mr. Mark Carroll in conversation. Spoke to Mr. Mark about it. Was informed by Mr Mark that this lady was in Overhill to look after Mr. Thomas—the prisoner. Remembered Mr. Thomas arriving by a later train. Remembered also that having known Mr. Thomas for many years, and having always had a liking for him, he warned him of the lady's presence in the village. Would know the lady again among a thousand. Portrait produced was undoubtedly a good likeness.

This line of cross-examination seemed to Mark to betoken unpleasant things; but he was prepared to have aspersions cast upon him, and, on reflection, he could see that a defense of that sort was no defense at all, and would recoil on the heads of those who used it. To try to blacken a man's character after sticking a dagger into him! He could already in fancy see and hear the style in which a British judge and a British jury would resent that infamy.

Philip Piggott, being examined, in part confirmed the evidence of the first witness. Counsel for the prisoner declined to cross-examine.

Drs. Marks and Morton gave evidence as to the call to attend the wounded man and the nature of his injuries. Under cross-examination confessed themselves certain, or thereabouts, that, with the one marked exception, all the injuries were inflicted with a walking-stick, the fragments of which were found within a yard or two of the evident scene of conflict.

The way having been thus made clear and straight for the hero of the day, Mark Carroll was called and put into the witness-box. The light in Baretti's face discomfited him for a moment, but he settled down to his business, and gave his evidence with a grave distinctness and an absence of apparent malice which gained him high credit with the court.

"This," said the counsel for the Crown, "is a painful case, and I shall be compelled to ask you some painful questions."

Mark inclined his head in assent to this, and the examination-in-chief began. It took Mark back to the quarrel between the prisoner and his father, and led on past Mark's

adoption by Mr. Carroll to the great libel case. Then it became more direct and particular.

"You recollect the night of the 29th of September last?"

"Vividly," said Mark.

"Kindly relate what happened."

Mark had received from the prisoner a letter (produced) asking for money, and begging that it might be brought to an hotel in the town. Having reason to suspect the prisoner's purpose he did not go. Thereupon the prisoner came to Overhill, and was there encountered, accidentally, by the historian. A conversation took place between them, in the course of which Mark felt it his duty to exhort the prisoner to an amended way of life. He promised, in view of such an amendment as he prayed for, to use his best efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the prisoner and his father, though he admitted he did not think the task a hopeful one. The prisoner charged him excitedly with having poisoned his father's mind against him, and, attempted to strike him across the face with the walking-stick he carried. The historian declared that he had defended himself as well as he could, but, being at length partially stunned by a heavy blow on the head and thereby felled to the ground, was savagely beaten as he lay. Finally, he declared that when the prisoner's walking-stick was broken by the violence of his blows, and he, the witness, was struggling to his feet, the prisoner drew a dagger from his breast-pocket. A struggle ensued, in which witness was powerless to avert the prisoner's intent. In the course of that struggle he asked, "Do you mean to kill me, Tom?" and the prisoner answered, "By —, I do!" Witness was then stabbed, and lost consciousness.

The thing was as plain as a pikestaff, and when the counsel for the Crown resumed his seat the jury in their own minds had found the prisoner guilty. But now arose the counsel for the defense, and hitching his gown and playing with the papers on the table, looked suavely for a minute at the witness and began:

"When did it first enter your mind, Mr. Carroll, to bring this charge against your cousin?"

"Not," said Mark, "until the medical men pronounced me out of danger."

"What was the reason of that delay?"

"I thought, sir," Mark answered, with a certain reluc-

tant magnanimity, "that my uncle—the prisoner's father—had endured enough already."

"You wished that the prisoner should escape punishment?"

"That was partly my reason for silence."

"That was partly your reason. Let us know it all, if you please."

"If I had died, sir," said Mark, gravely and gently, with downcast eyes, "the prisoner's position would have been different. I was silent, not from consideration for him so much as for his father."

"Do you know, Mr. Carroll, that you stand here in a singularly favorable light in consequence of that statement?"

"I know nothing of that," said Mark, simply. "I acted for the best."

"I am sure you did," returned the counsel, warmly.

The listeners wondered for the most part, but the judge and one or two of counsel's intimates, who knew his ways, began to look for something to arise from all this sympathetic suavity.

"Can you guess, Mr. Carroll," he began, after a little pause, "how much you owe the prisoner in money?" Mark looked inquiry. "Before your uncle dismissed the prisoner from his confidence and adopted you, how much money had you borrowed from him?"

"From the prisoner?" said Mark. "Several hundred pounds, I believe."

"Until he himself became impoverished, and whilst you were poor, he was uniformly generous to you, I believe."

"He was," said Mark, "uniformly generous."

"Did you offer to repay him when he applied to you?"

"I was perfectly ready to repay him," returned Mark. "That question did not arise."

"Oh!" said counsel. "What was the purport of his visit to you?"

"The result proved the purport," answered Mark.

"Then your cousin came down to Overhill prepared to make a murderous assault upon you?"

"I am forced to believe so."

"What was his motive for that?"

"He appeared to conceive that I had purposely supplanted him in his father's affections."

"Was there—is there any truth in that belief?"

"None whatever."

"You have not made it a systematic practice to blacken your cousin's character for your own gain?"

"I have not. On the contrary, I have made excuses for him."

"When he needed none," said the counsel. "A most efficient mode of libel."

This was the first thrust he gave, and Mark stood a little discomfited at its suddenness and keenness. Not that the discomfiture showed even for a moment.

"I am assuming motives, Mr. Carroll," the counsel continued, "and that is a thing I have no right to do. But now I must ask you one or two questions to which I must invite your particular attention. You know the Signora Malfi?"

"I have met her."

"Is this a recognizable portrait of that lady? Pray look at it carefully."

"It is, to the best of my remembrance, a portrait of the lady."

"Was the Signora Malfi in the village of Overhill on the 29th of September last?"

There was nothing but destruction to be got by denying this—little enough to be lost if he confessed it. Besides, Leggatt, the station-master, had sworn to his meeting her.

"I met here there."

"Kindly tell us what her business was."

"So far as she let me know it, she was there in search of a gentleman who, according to her statement, had wronged her."

"Who was that gentleman?"

"I am not responsible for these questions," said Mark. "I will answer if you press me."

"Who was that gentleman?"

"The prisoner."

"Were you anxious to spare him that revelation?"

"I was anxious to avoid the publication of a new scandal."

"Was that why you volunteered the statement to Leggatt, the station-master?"

"I offered that statement in self-defense?"

"Signora Malfi was never your mistress, Mr. Carroll?"

"Never."

"Do you know why she parted from her husband?"

"I did not even know that she was married." Mark had no sooner said this than he saw the folly of it, and hastened to qualify it: "I know that she lived with an operatic tenor who bore the name of Malfi; but I am informed that they were never married."

"Married or not married, do you know why they parted?"

"I do not."

"Brother Crawford," said the judge, "I presume that all this is germane to the case?"

"Absolutely, my lord. Attend, Mr. Carroll. Did Signor Malfi ever visit your chambers in the Temple to search for this lady?"

"He did," answered Mark. "I threw my rooms open to him. He examined them all, and went away again."

"The lady was not there?"

"The lady was not there."

"Upon your oath?"

"Upon my oath."

"You did not conceal her in the adjoining set of chambers? Come, Mr. Carroll, courage is a good thing in its way. I am not questioning in the dark."

"I am here to answer any questions you may put to me," Mark answered. Cool as he was, his head began to whirl, and the palms of his hands grew moist. Had they caught the signora and forced her to confess? He dismissed that awful fancy as pure nonsense; but why did the man hang round about her name in this way?

"Did you conceal her in an adjoining set of chambers during Signor Malfi's visit?"

"I did not."

"Did you afterward contemptuously dismiss her, saying that she had been an agreeable toy to you, but that you did not care to have an Italian dagger in your ribs for her sake?"

"Nothing of the sort took place."

"Did you ever profess any attachment for her?"

"Never."

"Now, was it yourself and not your cousin whom she came to see at Overhill?"

"She told me she was seeking for my cousin."

"After your cousin had broken his walking-cane over you, did you meet the lady by appointment previously made?"

"No."

"Did she tell you that she had been witness to the well-merited thrashing you had received?"

"All this," said Mark, desperately, "is pure fabrication."

"Did she upbraid you with your own broken promises to her?"

"No such interview took place."

"Did she finally stab you in answer to an opprobrious epithet from your lips?"

"The prisoner stabbed me."

"Were you afraid to reveal the real criminal because the reason for her crime would have blotted your own reputation?"

"There is no truth in any of these guesses." The awful fancy dismissed five minutes ago as pure nonsense was here again, but to go back was impossible. Perhaps Tom had seen the thing done. This reflection was a great relief, for the prisoner's mouth was closed by law. That was the evident truth of the case. Tom had seen it all, and had supplied his counsel with the truth, but without corroborative evidence his tale was worthless. From that moment Mark felt safe.

"Did you finally resolve to prefer the charge against your cousin to be revenged for the thrashing he had given you?"

"I preferred the charge with reluctance—great reluctance. I was moved to it by no sentiment of revenge."

"You were perfectly in the possession of your faculties when the blow was struck?"

"Perfectly."

"I will give you a chance to shelter yourself yet. There was no possibility of any hallucination in your mind at that moment?"

"None."

"You swear solemnly that your cousin, Thomas Carroll, struck the blow with that dagger which was afterward found in your body?"

"I swear that."

"You swear that no interview took place between Caterina Malfi and yourself that evening?"

"I swear that."

The counsel resumed his seat, the barrister who acted for the Crown waved a hand of dismissal to the prosecutor, and arose murmuring—

"Case for prosecution is completed, my lord."

Before Mark had left the box Crawford was on his feet again. His eye flashed and his voice rang like a trumpet:

"Call Caterina Malfi."

One Cohen, eagle-beaked and eagle-eyed, rose from his seat in the court at this cry, and made a gesture. All the court rose with him, and there was heard a murmur of amazement. Baretti cast one glance of triumphant hate at Mark, and a second later waved his hand with a swift and vivid gesture at the prisoner. Mark clutched the rail of the witness-box, turned white, and a sickly tremor shook him with an anguish so terrible that even in that moment his villainies were punished.

The crowd to the left rear of the dock parted slowly, and a face took every eye and held it. Pale lips, tight-clinched, pale swarthy cheeks, without one touch of red, great black eyes blazing with inward fire, nostrils dilating and contracting. Revenge in person.

Mark fell rather than walked out of the witness-box. In full possession of his physical strength he could have borne this better, but he was only a week or two away from his sick bed, and the tremendous shock unmanned him. Caterina saw him, and before Mark disappeared from the box their eyes met. He knew long since that he had no hope of mercy in her if she could take him once upon the hip, but he had always laughed at her. He knew now that he had nothing to hope from any fear in her. She would have walked to certain death to ruin him, and he could read that in her look.

The wave of faces in the court subsided and settled down to its old level. The signora stood in the box, the sworn interpreter of the court was summoned, the oath was administered, and the counsel for the defense confronted the witness.

"What is your name?"

"Caterina Torriani."

"Not Malfi?"

"No."

"You remember the night of the 29th of September last?"

"Yes."

"Where were you on that night?"

"At a place called Overhill."

"For what purpose were you there?"

"I was there to be revenged upon Mark Carroll."

"For what?"

"We met," said the signora, "nearly two years ago." And from that beginning she told her story. Sentence by sentence the sworn interpreter of the court turned it into dull English which made it none the less terrible in the telling. The silence of the place was marvelous until she related how Mark once upon a time had brought his cousin with him as a blind for Malfi, and then a murmur ran round the court and died. She went on calmly—with both hands clinched tightly upon her bosom—in a voice which never faltered and with a face which never changed, until she reached the scene at Overhill. Then once or twice she paused, and in spite of her restraining hands her bosom rose and fell like a wave. Her speech was made the slower by the fact that the judge took a full note of it, the interpreter waiting with one hand raised toward her, and his eye upon the judge, until each sentence was written. When the pen stopped the interpreter looked toward her and she let fall another sentence.

"I had made up my mind to kill him." Pause and dead silence, broken only by the scratching of the judge's quill. "But I had loved him, and I had to wait until he provoked me. I begged him to remember his old promises. He jeered at me. At last he called me—"

"What did he call you?"

One swift wave of crimson passed over her face and left her pale again. She spoke the word.

"Insulting epithet, my lord," said the interpreter. "Equivalent to street-walker."

"When happened then?"

"I had my dagger ready and I stabbed him."

"What is your object in coming here?"

"To ruin him."

"Do you know the consequence of this act to yourself?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that you are liable to imprisonment for life?"

"Yes."

"And you surrender yourself to justice?"

"Yes."

"That is the case for the defense, my lord."

"My lord," cried the foreman of the jury, "I beg to call your attention to the fact that the prosecutor has left the court."

"I have to ask for an authority for Mark Carroll's arrest on a charge of willful and corrupt perjury," said Crawford, rising again.

"Certainly," said the judge, as if the thing were a matter of every day.

"My lord," said the foreman, rising a second time, "we are ready with our verdict."

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury?" began the Clerk of Arraigns, and on the heels of his mumbled "guilty or not guilty" the foreman rapped out,

"Not guilty!"

The court was filled with the noise of unrestrained applause, as Baretti struggled to the dock and clasped Tom's hands across the rail. A minute later the door of the dock was unbarred, and the fiery Italian's arms were about his friend's neck, and the little man was crying passionately.

CHAPTER XXIX.

When Mark slipped out of court it was nobody's business to stop him. A quarter of an hour later he would have been hustled and roughly treated, but so far nothing had occurred to awaken popular anger. Amazement there was in plenty, and expectation in plenty, but as yet no rage. So he walked out quietly, unmolested.

As he stood upon the outer steps of the building he felt suddenly fugitive and outcast. There was not a hope he had had in the world, but that morning's work had wrecked it.

"I must bolt," he said to himself, "and that right early." His shoulder was sensitive to a phantom hand which might at any moment become real. He walked in apparent quiet down the steps, and for a hundred yards or

so along the street. Turning then into a by-way, he encountered the vehicle which had carried him from the railway station to the court.

"If you're not engaged," he said to the driver, "I should like a little drive into the country. I want a breath of fresh air after that crowded court."

"Yes, sir," said the man, "which way?"

"Out here will do," said Mark, and entered the coach. The man turned the horse's head and drove off at a stolid jog-trot. "I am not learned in the laws of this cursed country," said the fare to himself, "though I *was* bred to the Bar, but I suppose they'll want me at once." He lit a cigar and learned back out of observation's way, trying to think. He cursed Tom, the signora, his uncle's money, himself, and whatever else he thought of. He saw already how powerless he was to defy the terror he himself had raised. To have stayed behind and contemptuously to have denied the signora's story, would not that have been wiser than to have run away at once? He could drive back still. No. He was too late. He should have thought of that at first. To have left the court on her appearance was damnatory. A charge of perjury against himself—a counter charge of perjury against Caterina—a charge of conspiracy against her and Tom and Baretti—Baretti was in the swim, as his face of triumph made manifest. All this would have given time to run away at ease. His thoughts traveled in irregular circles like a straw in an eddy. But with every whirl they gave, he remembered one thing—he was ruined.

Mark's opinion used to be that he had never been a fool except in a way in which it is permitted even to wise men to infringe on the domain of folly, but it now began to occur to him that he had been a fool at large; an uncomfortable reflection. You can not reconstruct a life's philosophy in a minute, but Mark's tablets of commandment were smashed to pieces, and he was already prowling amid the shards to hunt up material for a new version. Logically, his old post of cynic and self-lover was as tenable as ever: but it was Fate who had dislodged him, and she would not be reasoned with. What if honesty were the best policy after all? If there were something in human affairs, or outside them, which made it impossible for man successfully to defy certain recognized rules? When Mark

had been lying between life and death doubts of a similar nature had occurred to him. Now that he was ruined, and his schemes were broken and his enemies triumphant, the doubts came back again. The gambler has no suspicion of his infallible system whilst he wins, but when the tide of fortune turns against it, he begins to suspect its virtues. And the system should be above suspicion when you stake your immortal soul and mortal welfare.

He tried to keep his head clear of these fancies, and to get an unobstructed view of the situation as it concerned himself. To kill Tom or Caterina, or both of them, would have been pleasurable, he thought, but he had still self-possession enough to smile at that as a longing after the unattainable. Besides, Mark was not a good hater. His blood ran cold. He despised better than he hated; and now, at least, the one thing he had to do was to steer clear of immediate dangers. Suddenly he remembered the papers intrusted to him that morning by his uncle, and he began to examine them. They made a somewhat bulky little parcel for an inner pocket, even when folded in the most convenient way, and a hasty observation showed him that they were mainly worthless to him, though of value to his uncle. There were two hundred and fifty pounds in notes, and there was a check made payable to Thomas Carroll by one Septimus Hardwicke for twelve hundred and thirteen pounds, and countersigned by the said Thomas Carroll. This check, as Mark knew, was given in payment for a strip of building land. If he dare go back to the town and present himself at the bank, he knew very well that he could have it cashed at once. Fourteen hundred and sixty-three pounds was enough to start the world with. If he had so much saved out of the fire he might begin to think himself fortunate, after all. He put his head through the window of the four-wheeler, and addressed the driver:

"I think you may as well turn back now." But his heart failed him even as he spoke. "Never mind. Drive on a bit further. Isn't there a country hotel out this way?"

"Fox and Hounds, sir," said cabby. "Two mile further on, sir."

"All right," returned Mark. "Drive me there." Cabby touched up the horse again, and away they went.

"Was there ever," Mark asked himself, "such infernal luck as mine? What an ass I am. Why didn't I drive straight to the bank after leaving that confounded court? As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. Perjury followed by fraudulent bailee. By God, Mark, you're a pretty fellow, and a very pretty reputation you'll leave behind you."

No pretense of not caring was likely to avail him much, and by and by he lay back in a sullen desperation, through which a fit of cursing broke now and again, as some nasty creature breaks now and then the surface of a sewer stream. His cogitations came in effect to this—that he was played out, exposed, and (most likely), at that moment, hunted. His enemies would burn to get hold of him, and the one good turn he had it in his power to do himself was to let them burn in vain. It would probably take him all he knew to get away.

He began to grow cool again, and his cunning awoke with his fears. He thought of everything that safety could possibly hang upon. The driver pulled up at the Fox and Hounds, and he found that the landlord knew him, though he had not been there for years and years. He called for a glass of brandy, gave the driver his choice of drinks, and said that he would stretch his legs by a little walk.

"You can get something to eat, driver," he said, carelessly tossing half a sovereign to the man. "We'll see about the change when I get back again. You can give the horse a mouthful of hay, too. Be ready to start in an hour."

Mark lit a cigar, and walked along the country road. If ever he had known this district he had forgotten it, and knew nothing more than that it took him away from the scene of his disaster.

"I'd better have stuck to her," he thought, as the signora came into his mind. "She must have been damnably fond of me to turn round like that."

He walked on for a long time until he came to a country railway-station near a level crossing. The time-table pasted against a board at the station wall was consulted, and he learned by reference to his watch that a train started in half an hour. He chose some inconsiderable place to ask a ticket for, and in due time was carried thither. Arrived, he went with simulated bustle to the hotel, gave a fictitious name and address at the bar, and requested that

certain packages should be preserved for him when they arrived. Then over a glass of brandy and water in the parlor he looked at a "Gazeteer" and found out where he was. This done, he called for a fly to a neighboring village, the very name of which had until then been strange to him, and reaching it after a four or five miles' drive, paid the fly and dined, and studied the local "Gazeteer" anew.

"If they follow me now, they will find a check here and there," he said to himself, "and I must have an hour or two before they get on the scent at all. Nothing so wide and safe as London."

Dinner over, he entered into affable conversation with the host.

"You can let me have a bed here to-night, landlord?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I haven't any luggage with me," said Mark, "so I'll pay you beforehand. How much?"

"Eighteen pence, sir."

"Great changes here since I used to know the place," said Mark. The "Gazeteer" had primed him.

"Ay, sir?" said the landlord. "As how?"

"Oh, I don't mean the village, but the neighborhood. Finding coal at Lecky, for instance, and running the railway through Welton."

"Yes, sir," said the landlord. "Great changes."

"Let me see," said Mark, "Welton's out that way, isn't it?"

"Lord bless you, no sir," answered the landlord, pointing out the way directly opposite, "that's the Welton Road. Past the church out there, sir, and then it lies due west. At this time o' year the sun sets over Welton from here."

"Odd how a man forgets places," said Mark, and, fresh from the study of the "Gazeteer," he asked a question or two and made a statement or two, to all of which the landlord answered willingly enough.

The fugitive had paid for his dinner as well as his bed, and when the evening dusk came on, he bought a cigar at the bar, and again announced his intention of stretching his legs. They had been pretty well stretched already, and he was beginning to feel tired.

"If by any miracle they should follow me so far as this

to-night," he thought, as he strolled along the village street, "they will rely upon my coming back to bed there. It's likely enough that I am piling up more precautions than I need, but there's no knowing, and I am not going to throw a chance away."

He walked on doggedly to Welton, and there found himself at a branch station of the Great Western Railway. He booked for Oxford and slept there. In the morning he bought a second-hand portmanteau—a new one looked suspicious to his eyes—and having provided himself with a few necessaries, he studied the hotel Bradshaw carefully, and selected a roundabout route for London. At the railway-station he saw, "The Carroll Stabbing Case. Extraordinary Revelations. Scene in Court," on one newspaper bill; and on another, "Melodrama in High Life. Carroll Stabbing Case. Startling Evidence." He crowded the great Eastern Question out of the bills, and he knew that for one day at least he was the best advertised man in Europe.

He bought the journals and took his place in a first-class carriage. He read the account of yesterday's doings in three or four different forms, and he listened behind the sheet whilst his fellow-travelers talked of him. Each of the papers had a leading article upon him, and he was as famous as Gladstone or Bismarck. "Phenomenal vengeance," on the part of Caterina, "phenomenal wickedness," on the part of Mark Carroll, "extraordinary escape" of Tom Carroll from the snares spread for him by the phenomenal cousin. The writers of the daily press had not often met with such a theme, wide as is the field they hunt in, and rich as it is in surprising incident. Crimes in plenty they confessed they knew—criminals were, unhappily, as plentiful as blackberries; but crimes and criminals of this amazing stamp were rare. Thus Mark had such a chance as rarely falls to the lot of any man of seeing himself as other people saw him. All the writers were duly cautious, too, and qualified themselves with suppositions. "If the evidence of this woman can be accepted"—"If we may argue from the sudden disappearance of the prosecutor"—and so on. Mark saw how little these reservations were needed, but he was behind the scenes. In the railway-carriage everybody denounced him in terms so unmeasured that a downright terror began to assail him. If

he were seen and recognized by any chance acquaintance, a mob might tear him into pieces. He began to see that murder would have made him less odious in the general mind.

By the route he had chosen it took him nearly the whole day to reach London, and he passed every hour in fear, and in a grim defiance of his own tremors. He had reached London by the Surrey side, and he dined at an ill-provided restaurant in company with an evening paper. He learned from its columns all that had been done in the search after himself, and he read once more the translation of Caterina's evidence. He discovered that the flyman had not returned until late at night, and that then, learning the truth, he had volunteered a statement to the police, who had traced the fugitive as far as Welton, from which place he was believed to have taken a ticket to Oxford. He put down the paper and forced himself to cut a few morsels of food, but the news-sheet drew his eyes by a sort of fascination, and he read on. The amount of money and money's value with which he had been intrusted on the morning of the trial was set down, and the very number of the notes he carried. He was alone in the restaurant, and, with a furtive look round the place, he drew his pocket-book from his breast—the heavier papers were stowed away in the portmanteau at his feet—and by a glance at the notes verified the reporter's statement.

At that moment the door opened, and whilst he somewhat flurriedly put back the flimsy papers, there entered from the street a stout and personable man with a white tie, a hat modeled on the lines of the head-dress worn by bishops, and a smile in which the most careless passer-by might read humility and benevolence. The new-comer gave a start on seeing Mark, and Mark looked at him with a face that had suddenly grown ghastly. Humility and benevolence vanished from the stout man's face, and he marched forward after a second's hesitation, and held out his hand.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Warner."

Mark took the proffered hand, but his own lay in it cold as death.

"I do not think," said the stout man, "that anything in the world could have afforded me so much pleasure as this unexpected interview. I use this little house regu-

larly, Mr. Warner, but I never expected that I should see you within these humble precincts. I should suppose it to be worth two or three thousand pounds to me to meet you here at this interesting juncture."

"Not quite as much as that, Bethesda," said Mark, recovering a little. "Rather than pay so much as that for so cheap a pleasure, I would blow your brains out to begin with and follow with my own."

Mr. Bethesda applied his hand to a gong which lay upon the table, and, a dirty waiter answering this summons, the good man called for a cup of chocolate. When the waiter had supplied this he lingered, and Bethesda stirred the contents of the cup with his spoon and took an occasional sip at it and an occasional look at Mark, who by this time had got his bank-notes back into his pocket and was looking blindly at the newspaper.

"Waiter," said Mr. Bethesda, calmly and blandly, "get me a hansom-cab in five minutes' time, if you please. Just look outside and stop the first that passes."

"Might look for a week," said the waiter, "and not see a hansom go by here, sir."

"A four-wheeler will do," replied Bethesda. The waiter sauntered to the door. "I shall be glad to see you beneath my humble roof, Mr. Warner," said the good man, when he and Mark were thus left alone again.

"I am obliged to you," said Mark, sardonically.

After this Mr. Bethesda held his peace until the waiter announced the discovery and arrest of a four-wheeled cab, when he disbursed his twopence, gave the man a halfpenny, and stood by whilst Mark paid for his own miserable and scarcely tasted meal. Then the good man begged leave to help Mark with his portmanteau, and walked behind him stealthily like a fat cat with a rat in custody. Mark entered the vehicle first, Mr. Bethesda having instructed the driver, followed, and the two facing each other were driven through the streets together. Mark leaning back scanned his companion's countenance furtively, and once or twice encountered his smiling look.

The journey was not a long one, but it gave Mark time to turn himself round in.

"Is this your house, Bethesda?" he asked, when the cab stopped. "Are you married or single? I forget."

"I am a single man," said Bethesda, who at that mo-

ment was leaning forward to open the cab-door, so that his face was brought near to Mark's. "I am a single man at present, Mr. Warner, but I do not live alone. He smiled as he said this, not quite so amiably as usual, and Mark's eyes glittered wickedly. When they alighted, Mr. Bethesda, keeping an eye on his companion, proceeded to unlock the door, and fumbled so much with the key that Mark lost patience, and taking it irritably from his fingers, turned it in the lock and flung the door open. The passage on which they entered was dusk, and Mr. Bethesda stood in the door-way whilst he called for a light. In point of fact Mr. Bethesda's prisoner was growing more resolute and assured in manner, and Mr. Bethesda himself was becoming a little timorous. Mark observed the change in his captor's manner, and was quick to take advantage of it.

"Don't stand there like an ass," he said, quietly. "Come in-doors. It isn't worth my while to commit murder yet."

Notwithstanding this assurance, Mr. Bethesda forbore to close the door, but waited until a maid-servant appeared from the lower part of the house with a candle. Then he not merely closed the door, but bolted it at top and bottom. He also locked it with a big inside key, which he withdrew from the lock and handed to the servant.

"Take care of that until I ask for it," he said. The girl stared from him to the key, and from the key to him, but said nothing. "You may light the gas in the back-room, Eliza. Thank you. Now you may go. You may save yourself the trouble of looking through the key-hole, Eliza," he added, as the girl retired, "because I shall be opening the door pretty constantly at unexpected moments."

"Now we can talk to each other," said Mark. "We may as well have our explanation at once."

"Precisely," said Bethesda. For a full minute there was silence, each waiting for the other to begin. Bethesda's patience gave way first. "I am very glad to see you here, Mr. Warner, because you bled me pretty freely once upon a time, and I am not so wealthy as I was. You are in possession of a decent sum of money now, according to the newspapers, and I rather fancy you are in a position to repay me."

"In plain English Bethesda," said Mark, "you think I

am in your hands, and that you can do what you like with me."

"Precisely," said Bethesda.

"It was necessary that we should come to an understanding, since chance drew us together," Mark began, "and we can arrive at it more comfortably here than elsewhere. When we have arrived at our understanding, you will see under what an error you brought me here. You have read the great Carroll case in the newspapers, no doubt."

"I though I had told you so," returned Bethesda.

"I have made a mistake, Bethesda," Mark went on, "which any man might have made, and it proved fatal to my plans. It not only proved fatal to my plans, but it set me in a very awkward corner, and exposed me to popular prejudice. Now, trading on my knowledge of that popular prejudice, you think to frighten me. If your own hands were clean, Bethesda, you might do it. But we are blackguards both, and if you threaten to expose me, I threaten to expose you. We are pot and kettle, Bethesda."

"Don't be too certain of your own position, sir," cried Bethesda. "To tell you the truth, sir, I do not believe that any man has been so unpopular as you are for many years. The tide of public feeling has set in against you very strongly—very strongly, sir. Do you know Mr. Baretti? Mr. Baretti is a gentleman whom I met at the Garrick during the period of my management for Mr. Carroll. He is a very ardent friend of your cousin's, and he has issued a document on his own account, sir. I have possessed myself of a copy, which you may read if you choose."

So saying, Bethesda took from his breast a pocket-book, which he opened with great deliberation. Mark looked hard at him all the while, and by and by took from his outstretched hand a small placard announcing briefly that the sum of two hundred pounds would be paid by Antonio Baretti, of Number Twenty, Montague Gardens, West, to any person who would give such information as would lead to the arrest of Mark Carroll, late of Overhill, in the county of Worcester.

"I suppose," said Bethesda, in a contemplative way, "that there can't be less than fifty thousand of 'em up and down London at this minute."

"Ah!" returned Mark, producing his cigar-case, and tearing the hand-bill into spills, one of which he lighted at

the gas. "And you think I'm fool enough to buy you off with all these out against me. You're quite mistaken, Bethesda. The Customs authorities would love to know you, and I promise you that, if you denounce me, I'll denounce you. Why, hang it all, man, I thought you had more sense than to try to bully me, with such a record as your own behind you."

Mr. Bethesda looked crest-fallen.

"You are too many for me, Mr. Warner," he made answer in a little while. "You always were."

"Now, mark me," said Mark, inspecting his cigar critically to see that it was properly alight; "your safety is bound up in mine. If I am caught that is your misfortune, whether it is your fault or not; for I am no sooner collared than I mention the name of my friend, Mr. Bethesda. Now in place of bullying me, don't you see that it's in your interest to see me away? I think, if you'll look at it long enough, you'll see it in that light. Take time. When I see two ways before me, Bethesda, one a bold way and the other a cowardly, I take the bold one, especially when I'm playing with a man like you. Nobody will be likely to look here for me. You can put me up here, until you have made arrangements with one of your river-side friends. How far is the river away from here, Bethesda? Not far, I fancy?"

"There's a bit of an old wharf at the bottom of the garden, sir," said Bethesda, humbly.

"That is very convenient indeed," returned Mark. "Perhaps there is a bit of an old boat at the bit of an old wharf? Eh, Bethesda?" Mr. Bethesda returned no answer. "If you have no objection, we'll go and see. Perhaps you know an old friend who can take care of me and get me down river without the formality of taking a ticket for me. I am not particular as to how I go. You see, Bethesda, I am a man who has mixed a good deal in all sorts of society, high and low, and there are a good many people who know me. In the circumstances which at present surround me, I am safer out of England than in it, and I take it as a great kindness on your part that you turned up in such a friendly way at so difficult a juncture."

"You are too many for me, Mr. Warner," said Mr. Bethesda. "You always were."

"Observe, Bethesda," said Mark, "the advantages of a

moral life. Let this lesson sink deep into your mind, and persuade you to loftier courses for the future. If you had never let me find you out you might have earned two hundred pounds at this moment by the turn of a hand."

"I have nothing to do in that sort of way, sir," said Bethesda, mysteriously, "for some years past, and I'm afraid I can't be of any service to you."

"All right, Bethesda," returned the visitor, "I am in your hands. If I am caught, whether by your instrumentality or not, I shall tell what I know. And I know a good deal. I can prove half a dozen cases against you, and you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. Your safety hangs on mine."

"I will do what I can, sir," returned Bethesda. "You are too many for me. You always were."

CHAPTER XXX.

BARETTI, in the sight of all the court, kissed Tom on both cheeks, Italian-fashion, twice over. The crowd there assembled guffawed at this unaccustomed spectacle, and some clapped hands at it. Public attention was for the time being concentrated on the released prisoner. He was local, and everybody knew him or knew of him. That gave a livelier interest to him, and had he been sentenced to a life's hard labor, it would have been more piquant to watch him than to have watched a stranger, whilst his deliverance was naturally more romantic than that of a stranger could have been. That which is nearest us touches us most.

Tom had never greatly courted public notice in this way, though he had been honestly ambitious of it in another, and so soon as Baretti could be brought to reason he persuaded him to leave the court. The approaches were crowded, and the dock official leaned over and touched his late charge on the shoulder.

"You can come this way if you like, sir," he said. "You can get out quieter."

Tom and Baretti slipped into the dock, and passing down a flight of stairs, found themselves by and by in a flagged court-yard, where a little bustle was going on. One blue-coated official was running across the yard with a carafe of water, and a glass, and another was kneeling and

fanning with a sheet of the "Times" at a recumbent figure in a corner. An old woman of the rural middle-class was crying incoherently and wringing her hands above the recumbent figure. Tom knew this old woman, whose husband had at one time held a farm under Carroll senior, and he was crossing over toward her when an official met him with his hat.

"What is the matter?" asked Tom.

"Lady fainted in court, sir," said the man civilly. "She's related somehow to our superintendent, and he had her brought down here where it's quiet."

Tom took another step forward, and to his amazement recognized the prone figure as that of Azubah Moore. He made no ado about the matter, but seeing at a glance that the attendants were all helpless, he walked into the corner and assumed the direction of affairs. By and by the patient, who was wofully pale, began to sigh and moan a little, and then her cheeks began to gather color. In a while she opened her eyes, and seeing Tom Carroll above her, looked at him with a calm, abstracted contentment for half a minute, then suddenly colored from the roots of her hair to the throat, hid her face with her hands, and tried to gain her feet.

"Lie still for a while, Miss Moore," said Tom.

"Yes, do, there's a deary, lie still as the gentleman says, my love," gabbled the useless old lady; but the girl was conscious now, as any girl would have been in the circumstances, of the disorder of her dress and attitude, and her one desire was to hide herself. A minute later she was afoot and clinging to the old lady's arm. Then the superintendent, her relative, abandoned the "Times," and lending his assistance, got the girl and the old lady both into his private apartments.

Some of the officials came up and congratulated Tom on his escape, and he thanked them, and with Baretti moved off into the street, where knots of people ran before him to cheer him, or interrupted him to shake hands with him, until he reached Baretti's hotel and was hidden from the sight of the throng.

"Carroll," said Baretti, marching up and down the sitting-room he had engaged beforehand for his friend's privacy, "there's a God in Heaven. It is not permitted

in this world for a man to be a villain without suffering for it, and His hand is over the innocent."

"Poor Mark!" said Tom.

"You mean that?" cried Baretti, half wildly.

"Yes," said Tom. "I mean it."

"You pity him?"

"Why not?" Tom asked. "I knew him when he was a lad, and loved him for years. I never did him an ill turn in my life. From the time of our going to London I was his best friend."

"Are these your reasons for pitying him?" asked Baretti, scornfully.

"Why not?" asked Tom again.

"Would you let him go scot-free if you had him in your hands now?" The painter was on the edge of despising his friend.

"Scot-free?" asked Tom. "What do you call scot-free? He has sold everything he had in the world and has bought remorse and shame with the proceeds of the sale. Pity him! I never heard of anything so pitiful."

"You are a fool, Carroll," said Baretti, "and an angel." He laughed oddly and took a turn or two about the room, and pausing suddenly, rang the bell, and on the waiter's appearance demanded champagne. When the man had retired he took his friend by both hands. "You will go back to your father now?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, with an uncertain accent. "I shall wait until he sends for me. Poor old governor. This will hit him hard. Everybody will know of it—the country will ring with it. He will almost die of shame."

"I shall go to see him," said Baretti, decisively, after a moment's pause. "I shall tell him how wrong he has been from first to last, how much he has been deceived."

Tom made no answer to this, but the waiter, returning a moment later with the wine, they drank to each other with a serious tenderness.

"Baretti," said Tom, somewhat suddenly, "did that Italian woman volunteer to come here, or was she forced to do it?" Baretti told the story of his interview with Caterina. "Wonderful," said Tom. "I could understand a sense of justice operating in such a case, but a hate like that goes beyond me."

"I do not think anybody but a woman could hate so,

Baretti answered. "I read your poets, and I believe in your Shakespeare: 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.'"

"What will happen to her?" asked Tom. "Crawford said she was liable to imprisonment for life."

"There are extenuating circumstances," returned Baretti, coolly. The signora's probable fate did not seem greatly to affect him. "If I were judge, I should remember what manner of man Mr. Mark Carroll has proved himself to be and should pass a formal sentence."

"Do you think Mark hated me, Baretti?" asked Tom, after a pause. "Was it all cold-blooded, or had I made him hate me somehow?"

"My dear Carroll," said the painter, "you are a man of lofty genius, and you have a noble heart, but you do not understand human nature. You were in your cousin's way and he tried to put you out of it. That made him dislike you. Then you found him out, and thrashed him, and in common circumstances he would have allowed that to pass without disliking you much for it, because he is a villain with a great deal of common sense. But when this woman stabbed him, he could not give the truth of the case, because he would have ruined himself with your father by doing so, and he saw a sudden way to get rid of you, who were likely to be dangerous to him, and, perhaps, it was a little pleasant to be able to strike you back again. Your cousin is not a common character, because he combines uncommon qualities of invention and courage with the common qualities of a rascal. By virtue of them he becomes great in degree, but you find the species to which he belongs in every street in London. He is an egotist. It is pleasant to me to think that he will suffer now in proportion to his egotism."

"Poor devil!" said Tom, half pitying, half contemptuous.

"Well," returned Baretti, nodding his head with half a laugh, "I will hate him enough for two, my friend."

As they sat and talked over their wine, and afterward at dinner, they made many guesses at fact and motive, but it is hardly worth while for us who know the story to follow their talk. But it is worth while to record the fact that when the news of Mark's escape reached Baretti, the little man, without a word to his friend, dashed out and saw the

county inspector of police for a minute or two, and, as a result of the interview, laid in his hands a ten-pound note and the written copy of that small handbill which Bethesda showed to the fugitive a little later on. Baretti was not only no longer poor, but was well on the road to wealth by this time. He was a fashionable portrait painter, and was neck deep in profitable commissions. Nowadays people with money are content to pay such prices for the counterfeit presentment of themselves on canvas that a painter in fashionable request makes more money than a prosperous merchant, and Baretti, if he had been so minded, could have lived in the palace of which he had been used to dream in days when a palace to live in seemed a worthy object of ambition. Now he had nothing to be ambitious for, and he only worked out of a habit of industry. He lived on a twentieth part of his income, and stored up money without finding any particular satisfaction in it. His bowl of ministroni and his dish of macaroni and tomato made a dinner he would not have exchanged for all the luxuries of the best English table, and his quarter flask of Chianti was wine enough for a day's drinking. In dress he was as rich and picturesque as the time would allow, but not extravagant, and he had no vices, so that now he had a command of money such as his old friend and patron had never enjoyed in his wealthiest days.

Tom, unconscious of Baretti's action, went up to London in the morning, and the painter stayed behind to interview the elder Carroll. He was disappointed, but not surprised, when Mr. Carroll declined to see him.

"Mr. Carroll says, sir," said the grave butler, "that he will be glad to receive, by letter, any communication you may have to make to him. He desires me, sir, to convey his compliments to you, and to ask you if you will take any refreshment."

"He is unwell?" said Baretti.

"Well, he says not, sir," returned the butler, "but he looks it. May I offer you luncheon, sir?"

Baretti thanked him, and walking down the avenue, reentered the fly which had carried him from the station, and drove back again. Leggatt, the station-master, recognized him, of course, and hovered about him in the hope of getting into conversation, but Baretti's no's and yes's froze him and he withdrew. There was nothing to hold Baretti

in the county town, and he returned to follow Tom to London, and arrived at home in the evening. He had something of a struggle within himself on leaving Overhill. He could see from the station the lofty trees which surrounded Lording's house, and he would fain have called there, but he was about his friend's business, and had been faithful so long that it had grown into a sort of habit with him.

When he reached town he gave Tom the result of his visit to Overhill, and both of them thought the signs encouraging. They sat talking until midnight, and had long ceased to expect a visitor, when the landlady tapped at the door, and announced that there was somebody below who wished to speak to Mr. Baretti. The painter ran downstairs in his dressing-gown and slippers, and confronted, in the hall, a man of 'longshore aspect, who ducked and scraped at him grotesquely.

"What do you want?"

"I want to put this into your hands, sir," said the man, producing a visiting-card, and handing it to Baretti. The visiting-card bore the name of Mr. Bethesda and the words, scrawled in pencil, "Follow bearer. I have M. C." This was almost obliterated by friction in the waistcoat pocket of the messenger, and had evidently been written in great haste. Baretti stared at it doubtfully a moment and then made up his mind.

"Who gave you this?" he asked.

"Mr. Bethesda," said the 'longshore-man.

"And where am I to follow you?"

"It's down Poplar way." The man was husky and smelt of rum, and altogether he was not an inviting companion for a journey—down Poplar way—to be begun at midnight.

"Come upstairs," said Baretti, and leading the way the man followed lumberingly, and stood ducking and making legs on the landing outside Tom's room. "Come in," said the painter, and he entered, fingering his tarpaulin hat and moving his feet uneasily. "Carroll, look at this. 'M. C.' is understandable enough, eh?"

Tom glanced at the card and then looked up excitedly.

"Shall you go?"

"We had better go together," said Baretti. "Come here a moment." Tom followed him into the bedroom. "Is that Bethesda's handwriting?"

"I think so, but I am not sure."

"Have you arms of any sort?"

"Why?" asked Tom.

"Have you arms of any sort?"

"A revolver I used to practice with."

"Cartridges?"

"Yes."

"Load it and put it in your pocket. The whole thing may be a plot. You will come?"

"I will come; certainly."

Baretti emerged into the sitting-room, and, having bade the man to wait there, he ran upstairs to put on boots, coat and hat, and returning in two or three minutes found Tom already equipped. The painter as he entered the room played rather ostentatiously with a brightly polished revolver, and looked the messenger in the face as he did so.

"'Scuse me, sir," said the man, hoarsely, "I hopes you know how to 'andle that, sir." Baretti contented himself with a nod. "Cos," resumed the messenger, "if you don't, you'll excuse me, sir, but they're a ockard sort o' thing to play with. I should leave it behind if I was you."

"Thank you," returned Baretti, locking it and slipping it into his pocket. "I prefer to take it with me."

"Very well, sir," returned the messenger. "I'm a single man myself."

He shook his head rather doubtfully notwithstanding, and followed Baretti down the stairs with a hesitating step, whilst Tom brought up the rear. A four-wheeled cab stood at the door, and the man motioned them both toward it.

"Ride outside, Carroll," said Baretti in a whisper, "and keep your eyes open."

Tom climbed up beside the driver, and Baretti and the messenger entered.

"The man knows where to go?" asked Baretti.

"He knows where to go all right," responded the messenger, and lit a short clay pipe, whose ancient flavor compelled Baretti to smoke in self-defense. The journey was long, and, in spite of the surmises and expectations with which Baretti kept himself awake, dull and tedious. It had neither interruption nor adventure from beginning to end, and to both Baretti and Tom it seemed to have lasted a fortnight or thereabouts, when at last the rumbling vehicle pulled up at the end of a street from the top of

which could be seen the dull gleam of the river and the lamps of one or two craft that lay afloat. Here the messenger alighted.

"It's nigh here," he said briefly. "You must let me go first."

A policeman strolled by and turned his light upon the party.

"Officer," said Baretti, "I am not sure that I shall not want you with me. Come this way." He slipped a few silver coins into the man's hand as he spoke. The policeman closed his bull's-eye with a snap and followed. The 'longshore-man took no notice, but shambled down the narrow street toward the river. When he had passed a dozen houses he paused, and waved a backward hand at his followers. They stood still in obedience to this gesture, and he went on for perhaps twenty yards, when he turned and entered at a little archway at the bottom of a court. In two or three minutes he reappeared, and, in obedience to an onward wave of the hand, they followed him again. He led the way this time to the open door of a tumble-down and deserted-looking house, and entered with exaggerated creaking caution, and the three who followed caught his attempt at silence by sympathy, and went on tiptoe after him. The passage they entered was pitch dark, but no sooner were they all within than a door opened at the side, and Mr. Bethesda appeared holding a rushlight in a ginger-beer bottle. He nodded to Baretti, who came first, but looked disconcerted when he saw Tom and the officer.

"You may wait outside, policeman," he said. "Pray walk in, Mr. Baretti. Pray walk in, Mr. Carroll. Joe, you can wait outside with the officer."

Tom and Baretti entered the sordid room, and Bethesda closed the door.

"Why did you send for me, Mr. Bethesda?" asked the painter.

"Well, sir," said Bethesda, respectfully and benevolently, "a copy of this little document fell into my hands today, and shortly afterward I met Mr. Carroll. I am not averse to the receipt of two hundred pounds, and I requested Mr. Warner—I beg pardon, Mr. Carroll—to accompany me home. Mr. Carroll bargained for my assistance in quitting the country. Gentlemen, I can rely upon your honor: Mr. Warner knows something which it would

be impolitic in me to make public just at present, and if I surrender him into your hands I must make a bargain that I receive the two hundred pounds before he is arrested."

"Who is Mr. Warner?" asked Baretti, "and what has he to do with it?"

"I beg pardon, sir," said Bethesda, "I spoke through force of habit. Mr. Carroll was long known to me as Mr. Warner."

"I am afraid, Mr. Bethesda," said Baretti, "that we shall have to trouble you to be a little more explicit. You know Mark Carroll's present whereabouts?"

"Yes, sir," said Bethesda, respectfully wetting his thumb and finger and benevolently snuffing the rushlight.

"And you are prepared to surrender him to justice?"

"On condition, sir, of the immediate payment of the reward. Not that I doubt you, sir. It is necessary for me to leave the country if Mr. Carroll is arrested."

"In short," said Baretti, "he has a hold of some sort upon you. Are you and he partners in any villainy?"

"A little evasion of the customs duties, sir," returned Bethesda. "Mr. Warner was aware—I beg pardon, Mr. Carroll was aware—of some transactions of mine in respect to tobacco. He traded, I may say, upon that knowledge, and made considerable capital out of it. I have long ceased to have any connection with that traffic, but Mr. Carroll threatens, if he is taken, whether through my instrumentality or not, that he will denounce me, and therefore supposes that he has made me responsible for his safety. Now I am quite sure, gentlemen, that if I put you in the way of apprehending Mr. Carroll, you will not interfere with my quitting the country."

"Do you suppose that I have brought two hundred pounds here with me to-night?" asked Baretti.

Mr. Bethesda looked, or feigned to look, disappointed.

"If Mr. Thomas Carroll would undertake that it shall be paid to me by post," he said, with deep respect, "I think I might accept that. I have means of slipping down the river, gentlemen, and the Hotel Bristol at Boulogne will be my address in a day or two."

"But, Bethesda," said Tom, with a look of some indignation and disgust, "you appear to forget that I intrusted you with a considerable amount of property for sale, and that you have not yet accounted to me for it."

"The property, sir," returned Bethesda, "remains unsold. That is a fact which you may verify to-morrow, and if my statement should prove untrue, I could not ask you to complete your bond."

"You will trust Mr. Carroll's assurance?" asked Baretti.

"Implicitly, sir," returned Bethesda.

"I thought it was a motto with a rogue to trust nobody?"

"I am no rogue, sir," said Bethesda, humbly.

"About that," said Baretti, "there may be two opinions. But, Carroll, we have our man, or so it seems. Give Bethesda the promise."

"It goes against the grain with me," said Tom. "I had rather let him go."

"I will not let him go," replied Baretti, grimly, "Mr. Bethesda, surrender this man to me, and you shall have your money remitted where you will."

"I beg your pardon, sir," returned Bethesda. "I have not the knowledge of you that I have of Mr. Carroll. If Mr. Carroll promises it shall be sent, I can go away contented."

"I can have nothing to do with it," cried Tom. "I will not make a bargain with one scoundrel to catch another."

Bethesda shrugged his shoulders slightly, as if to protest against this summary judgment of himself. Baretti turned away indignantly.

"If you will wait until to-morrow I will give you my check for the money, and you can cash it and go where you will."

"No, sir," said Bethesda, firmly. "If Mr. Warner—Mr. Carroll blows the gaff whilst I am in England I am not safe. They have nosed me already more than once. I can't risk it."

"Will you take my written pledge to forward the money?" demanded Baretti.

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bethesda, "but I couldn't get back here to enforce it. I shall be denounced, sir, directly Mr. Carroll reaches the police station. I have never infringed the moral law," he added, with an air of piety, "but I have broken the arbitrary provisions of my country's rulers, and if I am mentioned I am no longer safe."

"Very well, Mr. Bethesda," said Baretti; "if that is the case, unless you give me the information I require, I shall find myself compelled to abuse your admirable candor by calling in the officer outside."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Bethesda responded. "I will rely upon your honor. If you will come this way, gentlemen. Mr. Carroll must already be anxious about me."

He led the way from the house, and Baretti gave a signal to the officer to follow.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE was a misty light in the court as Bethesda led the way across it, and one or two stars were struggling to be seen through the gray clouds which overcast the sky. A moist wind blew up from the river, and a dreary cry sailed over the water from a barge on the further side. It was after two o'clock in the morning, and everything looked waste and dark and cold. Tom's quick sympathy found all this match well with his conception of Cousin Mark's inward state, and he had no hunger to be revenged on one whose crimes had already made him so forlorn.

At the exit from the court Bethesda paused, and addressed his followers in a whisper:

"It's the last house on the left—by the river. It overlooks the river, and he thinks I have gone away to make arrangements with a man I know for a boat. I don't think he has any arms, but he'll be nasty if he has. Perhaps you'd better let the officer go first, gentlemen."

The officer stood still with the rest to listen, and the light of a lamp fell full upon his face. Mr. Bethesda read there no sign of an enthusiastic reception of his plan.

"What's the job, gentlemen?" inquired the officer dubiously.

"Come in with me, Baretti," said Tom. "Since the thing has to be done, let us do it."

"Very well," returned Baretti. One hand toyed with the revolver in his pocket, and he passed the other through Tom's arm. Bethesda led the way once more, and they followed, stepping boldly, though Bethesda began to go on tiptoe.

"In there," whispered the informer, "the room before you."

The two friends walked through an open door-way into an unevenly paved passage. There Baretti took the lead, and after a step or two in the darkness, struck against the door and threw it open. The room thus revealed to sight contained but one occupant, and he was recognizable at a glance, though he had assumed a rough great-coat of pilot cloth, and a huge comforter encircled his throat. Two candles burned upon a foul deal table, and Mark Carroll's face glared pale between them as he half rose and faced his visitors. He had the look of a man who had been dozing, and for a second he was uncertain of their identity. But he had no sooner made them out than he cast both arms abroad and sent the two rushlights flying. Next he seized the slight table, and lifting it over his head dashed it with all his force in the direction of the door-way, and followed it with a rush. Luckily for Baretti and Tom, the clumsy missile, hurled at hap-hazard in the dark, caught the edge of the door, whence it fell minus a leg. It was no time for Mark to elaborate means of escape, and he had no time to think that his own weapon would prove a barrier against him. As he ran forward the table took him at the knees, and he plunged head foremost at the pit of Tom's stomach. It is one thing to have benevolent scruples about prosecuting a criminal who is a relative and was a friend, and it is another to find yourself with your nerves suddenly alert, and your blood suddenly afire at actual grips with that same enemy, as he tries to bolt before you have had a chance of letting him off. Tom, though Mark's velocity and weight doubled him up for a moment, pinned the fugitive before he could regain his feet, and held on like iron. Mark lay quiet and sullen, seeing the other figures at the outer door-way, and recognizing the hopelessness of the struggle.

Baretti struck a light and found the candles. They were broken, but he relit them and stuck them against the wall by their own grease. Then he dragged the table out of the door-way, and Mark came in submissively with Tom, who kicked the door close, and released his prisoner. Mark's unconscious hands arranged the great red comforter round his neck and smoothed his disordered hair. Then, for a second or two, he stood panting and glaring, with his

fingers entwined in the comforter, looking like a man with a halter round his throat. Tom looked back at him steadily, but with a sort of wonder.

"Damn you!" said Mark, breathing the words slowly and softly through clinched teeth.

"I never did you an ill turn in my life, Mark," said Tom. "I befriended you; I gave you money. I never spared myself in your services. What made you hate me so?"

"Hate you?" said Mark. "I never hated you, you buttery nincompoop."

"You waste words with him," Baretti broke in, contemptuously. "You might as well talk to a wild beast. He has neither heart nor conscience."

"Your friend's star is in the ascendant, Mr. Baretti," said Mark. "He has a rare taste in sycophants. Stick to him, and you will prosper."

"Mr. Mark Carroll," said the painter, "when your rattlesnake is killed, and you hold his teeth and his poison bags in your hand, you may regard the venomous apparatus with interest, but it can not wound you any longer."

"You were discerning enough, Mr. Baretti," said Mark, "to observe just now that words are wasted on me. You have got me. What are you going to do with me? I am tired. I am not altogether recovered from a recent illness. I am down upon my luck, at odds with fortune, and likely to be poor company for a pair of triumphant young fellows like you. I can't dismiss you, more's the pity. It would be useless to ask you to call to-morrow, I suppose."

Tom tasted to the heart the bitterness of this bravado.

"Baretti," he said, turning to the painter, "leave us for a moment."

"This is my affair, Carroll," said Baretti. "I will leave him, but I will be played off with no remorseful cheat."

"Go," said Tom, beseechingly, "leave us for a moment." Baretti left the room and closed the door behind him. They heard his feet stumble on the ill-lighted passage, and Tom waited for a little while before he addressed his cousin. "Mark," he said then, "we have been disgraced enough already, and I want to spare my father what I can. I paid off all old scores with you at Overhill. You have made new ones since, but they have been paid off too.

I don't profess to have one scrap of friendship or regard left for you. I don't profess to have much pity."

"Curse your pity," said Mark. "Get it over."

"I have not moved in this matter willingly," the other went on, "but Baretti has offered a reward of two hundred pounds for your apprehension, and he is bent upon surrendering you to justice. I think Baretti values me enough to give up that pleasure for my sake. But you have some of my father's property in your possession, and you must surrender it."

Mark fell upon his knees and dragged a portmanteau from a shadowy corner. This he opened, and from it he extracted a bundle, which he handed to his cousin. Tom turned over its contents by the light of the two guttering candles, each of which had by this time a spire of soot above it on the dirty whitewash of the wall.

"The bank-notes are not here, I think," he said quietly. Mark produced his pocket-book and, without a word, took out the notes and placed them in his cousin's outstretched hand. Tom set them with the rest, and put them in his pocket. "I shall pay the reward from this," he said, tapping his breast to indicate the notes, "and I think my father will hold that excusable. Baretti will let you go at my request, and I shall hope to escape the disgrace of your trial and conviction. It may not be too late, even yet, Mark, to try straight courses."

"My dear Tom," said Mark. "You overestimate yourself if you think that your powers of oratory are stronger or more persuasive than the circumstances I stand in. You win. I lose. Let that be enough for you."

"Don't you think—apart from your loss in the game you played—that you might have acted better by an old friend?"

"You are letting me go, Tom, and you have a right to air your goodness. I always told you that our philosophies were wide apart. You side with the ruck, who pretend, and I side with the few who make no pretenses."

"You!" cried Tom. "You make no pretenses? You, the perjured liar, hiding and skulking here from justice! You, the candid man! If you saw yourself as I see you, you would die for shame."

"The dying gladiator had a right to cover up his face so that no man should see his pains," said Mark. "Let me

wear my mask of cynical villainy to the end, Tom, since I have worn it so long. You shall be as justly indignant, and as gloriously magnanimous as you wish, without complaint from me. I am used to my part; you are used to yours. We could scarcely play in any other character just yet. And, for God's sake, Tom, get it over, and let me go. I am deadly tired, and I am ill, and I am just as willing to go into a police cell as to be set at liberty to starve."

Tom looked at him for a moment, and then, with a nod or two which bespoke his surrender of the puzzle Mark presented to him, he turned to the door and called Baretti. The painter entered and looked from one to the other. Mark dragged the broken table to the wall and, propping it there, sat down upon it, and with great diligence pared and cleaned his nails.

"Baretti," said Tom, "I have promised Mark that he shall go."

"I have promised myself that he shall not go," said Baretti. "You shall do no such monstrous injustice as to throw a villain like this loose upon the world. Justice and common sense cry out against it."

"Have I no right to save myself a little pain and shame?" Tom asked. "Have I not suffered almost enough at this man's hands already? Has not my father suffered almost enough already? As for revenge—look at the man and think of the sense of defeat and shame that gnaws that hard heart of his. Do you fancy I want more than that, or could have more if I tried for it?"

Mark looked up and tried to smile. "Well hit, Tom!" he said. "Tom is quite right, Signor Baretti. I am an object for commiseration."

The painter looked at him with passionate disdain.

"Go!" he cried, falling back upon his own language in his wrath. "Live chained to yourself, you dog, and eat your own heart till it poisons you!" Tom, not understanding the words, and misinterpreting the fiery gestures which accompanied them, put himself between Mark and Baretti. "Let him go, Carroll, if you will," said the painter, with sudden quiet. "You are right, perhaps. Let him go."

"I can appreciate the delicacy of your motives, Tom," said Mark. "But you appear to forget that my escape does not depend upon you alone. I must say as Shylock said, that you take my life when you do take the means

whereby I live. You have stripped me. I have no means of getting away. You will have me caught, and I shall besmear that delicate family honor of yours, unless you supply me with the wherewithal for travel."

Without a word Tom took the bundle of notes from his pocket, and having counted out fifty pounds by the dim light of the two flaring candles, now very near their end, he handed that sum to Mark—who counted it over again, and disposed it in his pocket book, also without a word.

"You may go," said Tom, after a moment's pause. Mark peered about him on the floor, and, having found a cap there, put it on and walked from the room. The others followed, and saw him meet Bethesda in the outer street.

"I am not valiant, neither," said Mark, with a bitter laugh, "but every puny whipster gets my sword. Even this poor devil can despise me. Well, Bethesda, have you made your two hundred?"

Bethesda stood silent and amazed for a while, but finding voice at last, he turned upon Tom, and almost gasped at him—

"You have let him go, sir?"

"I have let him go," said Tom.

"Then," cried Bethesda desperately, "my life isn't worth a minute's purchase."

"My dear Bethesda," said Mark, "I am reformed. My cousin's nobility has melted me, and I am a disciple of the creed of Namby Pamby. To you as the chief instrument of my conversion—inasmuch as you brought the converter and myself together—I owe the most heartfelt thanks. I may be able to repay you some day, Bethesda, I should like to heap coals of fire upon you, Bethesda. I should also like to heap you upon coals of fire. Good-night, Tom. Good-night, Signor Baretti. Good-night, Bethesda. Good-night to you, sir," to the officer. "One of these days we may be better acquainted. You, I believe," he continued, turning to the 'longshore-man, "will answer to the name of Joe."

"I've got a right to answer to it," said the 'longshoreman, "seein' as it's the name as I was crissened under."

"Do you know what name I answer to?" asked Mark.

"No, I don't; and what's more, I don't want to," said the man.

"Curiosity is sometimes a vice, and it's opposite a virtue," said Mark quietly. "Are you willing to earn a sovereign easily?"

"I'm allays that," returned the man, "provided it's to be done honest, mind you."

"A tribute to *your* presence, officer," Mark observed, turning courteously to the policeman. "There is a portmanteau of mine in-doors, Joe. Find that, if you please, and then oblige me by finding a boat. I want to drop down river this morning."

The 'long-shore man went into the house for the portmanteau and brought it back with him. Mark lit a cigar in the interim and smoked with a pretense of tranquillity. When the man emerged from the door-way he motioned to him to lead, and followed him toward the river. Tom and Baretti watched him till he turned from sight, and each drew a breath of relief when he was gone.

"You don't want me, gentlemen?" said the policeman. "I'm on my beat, that's certain, but I haven't touched my mates at either end of it, and they'll think there's something up."

Baretti slipped four or five shillings into the man's hand, and he departed well satisfied.

"Good-night, Bethesda," said Tom, moving away. "Your money shall be paid you, provided that you have kept your trust."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Bethesda, "but did you tell Mr. Mark Carroll—did you give him any idea as to where I meant to go, sir?"

"None," said Tom.

"I am not safe from him anywhere," said Bethesda wretchedly. "He's a perfect fiend. There is no bottom to his cunning, and he doesn't know what pity means."

"You should have thought of these things before you earned your money," said Baretti, as he turned to go. Bethesda seemed to cling to them.

"I made arrangements, gentlemen," said he, "to drop down river this morning, but he has gone before me, and I dare not do it. He's got pluck enough besides that, gentlemen, to walk into the first police station and give information against me."

"You have done your work and earned your money at your own risk, Bethesda," said Baretti.

"But we never bargained that he was to be let off, gentlemen," cried Bethesda. "He's at large, and I have made an enemy for life."

"Naturally," said Baretti. "Good-night." He drew Tom away, and the miserable Bethesda stood for awhile looking after them. In two or three minutes he recovered something of his self-possession and made his way through the silent streets toward his own residence. He had a walk of some two miles before him, and he was nervous about all the corners and all the shadowy places. His home reached at last, he admitted himself by a latch-key, and, moving like a ghost, took up a portmanteau and a bottle from the room in which he had conversed with Mark a few hours earlier. Bearing these with him, he stole out at the back door and crept along a weedy garden to the river-side. There, at the foot of a set of slimy little steps, lay a boat with a heap of tarpaulin at the bottom of it. As Bethesda made his cautious way down the steps the tarpaulin moved, and a man appeared from beneath it.

"That you, master? You're precious late. It's cold waitin', I can tell you."

"Take a little comfort, George," said Bethesda, proffering the man the bottle. The fellow took it and drank greedily.

"That's the right sort," he said, as he restored the cork. "That warms a man."

"Quietly down stream, George," said Bethesda, bestowing the portmanteau at the stern. He took the tiller ropes, the man cast loose the painter and took the sculls. The boat glided into the center of the river, and Bethesda shook his hand lightly toward the house from which he was retreating. "The bill of sale," said Bethesda inwardly, "will take effect to-morrow. The two hundred is providential, but—"

His thoughts were comfortless, and he kept a keen look-out ahead. All the shadowy places were dangerous to him in his fancy, and he steered from side to side of the stream, and took fright a thousand times. He reflected that he was doing the safest thing after all. The Thames is a biggish river, and it is possible for two people to be on it at the same time without each being aware of the other. His enemy had started an hour ago, had begun two miles lower down, and had not the remotest reason to believe

that he would follow. He was convinced that he was safe enough, and in spite of his conviction he was very much afraid.

"She's lying off Greenwich, isn't she, George?" he asked after a time.

"What, the 'Goshawk'?" said the man. "Oh! she's there right enough."

"She isn't doing anything—" Mr. Bethesda paused with a lingering accent of inquiry.

"Fishy?" said the man, with a laugh. "She's done with that sort of game, I should fancy. The blue uns is too fly, sir."

Mr. Bethesda sighed an assent to this poetic statement of a grief.

"Yes," he said, "the customs officers are exceedingly alert; exceedingly alert."

"Alart! cuss 'em," said the man with the sculls, and finding himself unequal to the expression of his feelings, he spat vehemently.

The moon had fallen, and except for the twinkling lights that shone here and there the eye found nothing to rest upon outside the sweep of the sculls. Bethesda peered eagerly forward and saw a million things which had no reality. Hulking ships moved up to override the boat and melted when they touched her, and shadowy craft of smaller size with a shadow's silence crossed her course, Bethesda holding his breath until the expected collision came and his own boat floated through the phantom. But in a while the black air began to take a tone of gray, and a hulk came out coldly here and there. Then the mantle of the night was lifted by another fold, and he could see the shore on either side of the stream.

"It's a longish pull to Greenwich, governor," said the oarsman.

"You don't earn thirty shillings every day," returned Bethesda, dryly.

"I ain't a-grumblin'," the man answered. "You allays paid a fairish price, governor. It ain't that. The walls of my stomach is regular falling in, I do assure you. There's a public-house a half mile down, as'll be open by the time we get to it. A bit o' cold meat'd be the makin' of me. There's no hurry for the 'Goshawk,' governor."

"Very well," said Bethesda, though he dreaded the

land. It was absurd, of course, to fancy that Mark Carroll would be so great a fool as to walk into danger, as he would have to do if he betrayed his betrayer now. But to the criminal mind, when it is constituted on the pattern of Mr. Bethesda's, it does not greatly matter that any dread may be ridiculously unfounded. It sees its ghosts, and knows that they are ghosts and nothing more, but it expects a solid hand to stretch out from each of them, and mental certainty and nervous fear are constantly at war. Bethesda grew more and more nervous as time went on, and in the gathering light he watched the shore and the river with increased misgiving. In the course of some three quarters of an hour, for the tide was running strongly up stream and their progress was extremely slow, they came to the house of which the man had spoken, and he, pulling in shore, made fast the boat at the bottom of a set of slimy steps, and landed. Bethesda, with a big cloak pulled high about his neck, followed, up the slimy steps and into a littered yard. A sensation he had never experienced before was upon him, and he seemed surrounded by some such nameless and unformed terror as that which attacks men in nightmares. It was raining, the morning wind was keen, and he pulled the cloak higher about his face, as with bent head he crossed the yard toward the open door. The man pushed in before him past a lounging figure there, and Bethesda essayed to follow, but the figure planting itself straight across the door-way, he looked up with a start and saw Mark Carroll. He recoiled in dismay, and Mark followed with one forward step.

"Well, Bethesda?" said Mark coolly. "We seem fated to encounter each other."

Bethesda with a white face looked at him for a second or two, and then glanced right and left, as if looking for a chance to run away.

"We can be dangerous to each other, Mr. Warner," he said, when he had a little recovered himself, "but is it worth our while, sir? Don't you think we had better to avoid each other, sir?"

"Don't you think," asked Mark, in answer, "that you had better have put that question to yourself last night?"

"I foresaw what would happen, sir," returned Bethesda. "I knew your cousin was not the man to proceed to extremities."

"Bethesda," said Mark, "this is not the time or the place of payment, but I have a score against you, and I shall pay it. Trust me."

"I beg your pardon, sir," cried Bethesda, with a ghost of his habitual smile, "but don't you think that just at present it might be worth your while to overlook last night, sir? It may be in my power to serve you now, Mr. Warner. It can't be comfortable for you to be in England, and the regular channels are pretty closely watched, sir, I suppose."

"You ask me to trust you again," said Mark, "to be betrayed again?"

They had walked away from the house-door by a mutual instinct of fear, lest they should be overheard, and now they were near the edge of the quay.

"Betrayed, sir," said Bethesda. "What for? What could I get by betraying you? I should only get myself into danger."

There was something in it, Mark thought. Bethesda had run his risk once for the sake of pay. He was not likely to run it again for nothing.

"I am leaving the country myself, Mr. Warner," Bethesda continued in a whisper, and with quick, fearful glances right and left. "I can find you a safe passage over to Boulogne, and there you have the world before you. What's the use of our trying to do each other harm, sir, when if you strike a blow at me it must be fatal to yourself, and if I strike a blow at you, I run my own neck into a noose for nothing?"

Mark laid both hands on the cloak Bethesda wore and held him firmly. It was the gesture he had used with his cousin Tom at the beginning of their quarrel at Overhill, and it was a thing that came natural to him and was significant of character.

"What are you going to do?" cried Bethesda, with a terror-stricken face. They were standing within a yard of the edge of the quay, and there was a look in Mark's eyes which filled him with fear and loosened his knees beneath him. Mark saw his dread and smiled grimly.

"You poor coward," he said. "Listen to me."

"Yes, sir," said Bethesda. Mark could feel him trembling.

"Do you think," he asked, "that it is worth my while to throw you over there? Can you swim, you quaking coward?"

"No," said Bethesda; "not a stroke."

For the first and last time in his life a real rage unleashed itself in Mark Carroll's heart, and for the first and last time he acted on an impulse. There had not been a thought of murder in his mind. He was one of the unlikeliest men in the world to think of it as a practical method of revenge. But Bethesda's cowardice put it there; the opportunity was there—a sudden swirl and rush of hate and rage filled every cranny of his mind.

"Not a stroke," said Bethesda.

"Then damn you—drown!" Mark hissed between his teeth, and shot Bethesda back into the stream. But the heavier man clutched at him like lightning, and they fell together, Bethesda underneath. The water at the quayside was deep, but they went down until they touched the bottom, and Bethesda held on madly. Mark set his knees against the other's breast and tore himself away, but almost before he reached the surface he felt a pair of arms closing round his neck. He turned to free himself, and in the same instant struck out strongly with both feet, so that he rose high in the water, and the groping hands missed his neck, but clutched his left arm, and there was Bethesda's face below him at the surface gasping and glaring. Mark struck it again and again, and Bethesda let out a series of gurgling yells and went down once more, dragging his enemy with him. This time Mark got his feet against Bethesda's body, and struck out with all his might, but the drowning wretch held on. They came up a second time, and Mark could see the slow light heave at him as he struggled to the surface. When he reached it, a hand clutched his hair and held on tightly. Another hand clutched Bethesda, and the two were hauled into a boat. Mark looked round, and saw that the pier from which he and Bethesda had fallen was by this time forty yards away. Bethesda was still holding to his sleeve, and was howling and spluttering still.

"He tried to drown me. There's a warrant out against him for perjury."

Mark raised his hand and struck Bethesda in the face.

"Hillo! Stop that!" cried an authoritative voice.

Mark looked round upon the man who seized him, and then upon the boat's crew and the boat.

"A detachment of the Thames police, I believe," he said, quietly. "Very well. This gentleman is the largest smuggler in London—Mr. Bethesda. You can take care of both of us."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"No news from the governor, Baretti?" said Tom, on a day three months later. He was dressed for a journey, and his room was in such disorder as with some men results from the hasty packing of a portmanteau.

"No news," returned Baretti. "I had hoped for an answer which would have made this unnecessary, or, indeed, impossible."

"Why?" said Tom. "I give you my word, Baretti, that if it had not been for the things my father has had to suffer I should have been glad to see affairs turn out so. Here's an honorable living in my fingers, and a chance to see a little bit of the world in various aspects. You don't appreciate the importance of the position, Baretti. I am the great Hoffmann's solo violinist, and the second captain of his host. He will play in the course of the tour a dozen compositions of mine, and my fame will be carried into the corners of the earth. But my cab is at the door and the train awaiteth me. Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you."

"Write often," said Baretti. "Good-bye."

Tom took up his violin-case from the table and ran down-stairs. Baretti waved him an adieu from the open window as he came upon the street, and Tom entering his cab was driven away. Borne to the railway station, he took a third-class ticket—resolute to begin his new career economically—and in due time was landed at Birmingham, where he drove to an hotel, dined, and dressed in time for the first concert of the great Herr Hoffmann's provincial tour. He walked to the Town Hall and found his own name blazoned on the placards outside in red letters almost as big as Hoffmann's own. There was a great crowd outside the building, and cabs and carriages were rolling up at a great pace. He never thought for a moment that Hoffmann had engaged him for any other reason than a warm approval of his musical powers might furnish. But

the great Herr, though a severe musician, was a keen man of business into the bargain, and a born showman. He knew, if Tom did not, the value of a man whose name for the past three or four months had been in everybody's mouth as the hero of one of the most exciting real-life dramas the living public could remember.

Tom made his way to the side-door to which he had been directed by his chief's last letter, and, being admitted, found himself in the midst of a little crowd of his fellow-artists. He had rehearsed with them in London, and knew most of them by sight, but he had as yet not even a casual acquaintance with any of his confrères. So with a nod here and there in answer to the recognizing salutes of one or two of them, he walked to one end of the room and read absently the big poster announcing the concert. "Soprani: Madame Fiorituri and Miss Moore." Who was Miss Moore? Could it be possible that his old play-fellow and *protégée* had already advanced far enough to be engaged by Hoffmann?

He was hoping it might prove so, for her sake, when the chief's voice aroused him, and the instrumentalists began to move toward the orchestra. Hoffmann, beholding him, shook hands in a very friendly fashion, and was evidently disposed to make much of him. In a little while the business of the night began, and Tom was too much absorbed in his work to think more of the name he had seen upon the placard until the owner of it appeared before him on the platform. Azubah was prepared for this meeting, and saluted him gravely. The song she sung had an orchestral accompaniment, and that fact kept Tom in his place, otherwise he might have met her below, and have spoken to her. When she sung she surprised and pleased him, and he was delighted that the audience recalled her. He had no more to do until the beginning of the second part of the concert; and, on her disappearance from the platform, he followed.

"I wondered if it would turn out to be you whose name I saw advertised for the concert," he said when he had overtaken her. "You have improved immensely. You will make a name, Miss Moore, and nobody will be better pleased than I shall."

He thought as he looked at her that she had improved in more respects than one. To talk of beauty unadorned

is all very well in its way, no doubt, but there are some people who pay for dressing. Tom had never seen the girl in anything but the simplest costume until now, and she showed to surprising advantage. She had made her dress with her own hands, but she had caught the best points of the prevailing style, and the mode and the material alike suited her. Whilst Tom spoke to her she drew an opera-cloak over her white shoulders, and pulled the hood, which was lined with snow-white down, over her head.

"Do you really think my singing improved, Mr. Carroll?" she asked.

"Wonderfully," said Tom; "wonderfully." She blushed with pleasure.

"You gave me an admirable master," she said, shyly. "He made me work very hard, but I did not like him any the less for that."

"Nobody can make anything of art," said Tom, "who is afraid of work." He was looking at her with a new interest all the time. She was not what he would have called a lady. His father's manner of separating ranks had naturally descended to him. But he admitted that she made so excellent an imitation that nobody could have told the difference. Her father was a half-bankrupt farmer, and her mother kept a dairy in South London, but, so far as sight or hearing went, just now, she might have been born in a mansion, and bred all her days in the best society. "How did you come to meet Hoffmann?" he asked. "Are you with us for the whole of the English tour?"

"Yes," she said, answering the last question first. "I went to Mr. Hoffmann and asked him to hear me sing."

"That was courageous," said Tom, with a laugh.

"Was it?" she asked, simply. "I wanted to do something for father."

"What did Hoffmann say," asked Tom, "at first? I can tell what he said at last."

"I told him why I had called, and he threw the piano open, and made a motion with his hand. I sat down at once and sung. When I had done he said 'something else.' I snng something else, and then he said, 'Leave your address. Good-morning.' He wrote two days later offering me an engagement."

"Weren't you afraid of him?" asked Tom.

"Oh," she answered, "not at all. I had heard that he

was odd and eccentric before I called, and I knew partly what to expect. I should have liked it better if he had given me a little time to prepare myself, but I am not very nervous about singing now."

Now Tom had nothing very special to say to Miss Moore so far as he remembered just then, but she had one or two things which she wanted very especially to say to him, and as yet could not. She had no right to speak to him of his private news, and yet it seemed so cold and thankless a thing (after all she owed him and all he had done for her) to meet him here in his fallen fortunes, and show him no sympathy.

"I suppose not," said Tom, absently, to her last statement. He had only half heard it, and was not paying any great attention to her speech, and now he took to trifling with his watch-chain and looked straight over her head meantime, as if he saw something sorrowful at a great distance. She noted this keenly, and her heart stirred with pity over him. Something that was not pity moved within her also, but she had neither the desire nor the power to define that tender emotion. Girls of twenty or thereabouts are not greatly given to self-analysis by nature. It is likely enough that Tom's troubles had given a tone of sorrowfulness to his expression of face when he had nothing to animate him and was silent. She was thinking of his altered fortunes, and it seemed natural to fancy or to feel that he was thinking of them also.

"I am sorry to see you here, Mr. Carroll."

Her voice sounded still in her own ears, and he looked at her with an almost startled air, or she might have doubted that she had spoken, the words had at last so unconsciously framed themselves. He looked at her and read her meaning at once.

"Thank you," he said, answering her meaning and not her words. "I shall like the life very much, I have no doubt. My father is very unhappy, and I am sorry about that. There is nothing else to grieve me greatly."

It struck him directly he had spoken that this was an odd thing to say, and a second or two later it came into his mind that it was much more singular to have meant it. How little he thought about Mary now! She had used to be constantly in his thoughts, and now he felt with a self-accusation of disloyalty that her image had been banished

from his mind. Azubah was hailed a moment later by that same country-looking woman in whose care Tom had last seen her. The old lady bobbed at Tom when she recognized him, and was plainly embarrassed. He nodded back at her with a cordial recognition.

"I shall see you again, Mr. Carroll," said Azubah, timidly.

"Yes," he said, somewhat more gravely than he intended, "we shall meet often."

She went away half ready to cry, thinking that she had exceeded her right and had offended him. He sat down in a corner of the room and tried, by thinking, to recall that lost image of whose existence he had just been reminded—the image he had sworn a thousand times never to forget. It had, of course, seemed impossible to forget her. It was now just as impossible to recall her, or to bring back the old warmth and tenderness of heart. He wondered if she had ceased to think of him in the course of these eventful months. He knew that she must have heard of him often enough, and he was ready to writhe with shame at the memory of his own publicity. How had she thought of him? Had she believed in him all through, or had she waited for the proof of his innocence to appear? In either case he was soiled enough to be distasteful to himself. He aggravated himself with questions, and aggravated himself the more, because at heart, he had ceased greatly to care what the answers might be. But now he came to think about it, it was so much of a surprise to find he had ever ceased to think about it that it was not easy to leave himself alone. By and by, finding himself alone, he began to pace to and fro thinking. Azubah caught sight of him once or twice as he passed the half-open door-way of the room in which she sat, and to her mind it was as clear as day that her ill-advised speech had set him thinking of the advantages which had fallen away from him, and the undeserved shames which had gathered round him in their place. The kindest and best of men, so regal in his generosity, so unselfish, and to have suffered such indignities! So handsome—that went for something, though she never thought so—so young, so gifted, so unfortunate. It felt like heart-break to think of these things.

If she could have read Tom's thoughts, she might have sympathized less keenly with him, but then that is often so.

To know that he was trying to flog a dead love for another woman into life again would scarcely have pleased her.

At the interval the members of the orchestra came swarming down-stairs, and for a few minutes the room was extremely noisy. The thread of Tom's thought was broken, and he forgot to piece it for the time being, and the great Hoffmann, being in a good humor with success, clapped him on the shoulder and cracked a joke, at which he laughed readily enough. Azubah saw this also, but nothing Tom did could fail to win her admiration. How brave it was of him to throw off his troubles so, and laugh them in the face. The poor girl had been too busy all her life to read romances, or she might have found out before this time what was the matter with herself. Nowadays no virgin need be ignorant of the meaning of the first movements of the virgin heart. Novelists and novelettists, poets and poetasters, are thick about her, and are ready to teach her all she should know and something that she should not. But Azubah lived outside their influence, and so she fell in love in Nature's own fashion, which is perhaps the best, and had no self-conscious flutters and promptings, nor any bookish pruderies. She fell in love, or glided into love, as a good girl ought to do, unwittingly and unthinkingly. There is always a delicacy—or there should always be a delicacy—in a man's mind about invading the privacy of maiden thought and feeling. The hands that draw apart the curtain are profane.

When Azubah had sung her last song and was prepared to leave the hall, she and Tom encountered once more, and said good-night.

"By the bye," said he, "we are due at Manchester to-morrow. By what train do you travel? We might go on together. There are a hundred things I want to speak about."

She was the little farm-girl still, and he still the lordly seigneur.

She told him what he wished to know, and he arranged to meet her at the railway station. They traveled together and talked of old times and old people, and of the prospect of the dairy and her father's health. The old woman who played the part of Azubah's chaperon was not accustomed to travel, and could not sleep in strange beds. Her night having been broken, she fell fast asleep now and left them

to themselves, but there was nothing in their speech to which the world might not have listened. There was nothing in Tom Carroll's thoughts that the whole world might not have known. The girl was certainly wonderfully improved, and he acknowledged with some surprise that she might have taken her place in any society, and have drawn forth none but approving comments.

One thing which would have come sooner but that his life had been lived in such a whirl for the past three months began to impress itself upon his mind, and this was the occasion on which he had seen Azubah in the prison courtyard at Worcester. It pained him to think that curiosity had taken her to the Assize Court to witness the trial, and since he was not the sort of young man who fancies every second girl in love with him, no notion of a tender interest on her part entered his head. He could not question her about it, but he found her traveling companion alone that evening and spoke to her, and the old woman with no prompting led up to the theme herself. She was what is called in the country a notable woman, and she spoke her own mind to everybody, gentle and simple, with amazing freedom.

"It was the talk of the country, Mr. Thomas," she said, "as you and your poor dear father 'ud be a-makin' things up, and I'm sorry to see as it isn't so. I look on it as a bit of come down for Moore's daughter to be play-actin' about the country i' this wise, and for gentlefolks born and bred it do not look proper, that I *am* sure."

"Well, you know, Mrs. Askin," said Tom, good-humoredly, "it's a very agreeable method of earning a living."

"You hadn't ought to earn a livin', sir," said the elderly dame, with warmth. "Now that cousin of yours is found out, sir, as did you all that mischief, you ought to be at home again enjoying of your own. Excuse me makin' so bold, sir, but why don't you go home and speak to the old squire?"

A dignified man might have resented this inquiry, but Tom had never set up to be dignified, and he answered simply that he had rather not talk of that matter just then. The notable woman's tongue once being loosened, away she went.

"Oh, sir," said she, "it's well beknown—beggin' your pardon for saying of it—as you and your father's a pair,

and pride's in the family. Not as ever you was proud to folks like me, for many a time me and Askin said to one another as there was nobody haffabler than Mister Thomas in our part of the country. But you gentlefolks is sort of hard and stand-off one with another, sir, and if a old ooman might speak her mind as was a tenant of your father's for thirty 'ear, it's your fault, sir, as much as hisn. There's me and our Zubah's talked it over pretty often, and we're o' one mind about that, though it ain't often as we are."

"You have your little disagreements, then?" said Tom, laughing, though a little constrainedly.

"We're like other folks," said the old lady, "and she's headstrong like most young things. Self-will ain't the word for her. When her was a-staying down with me three months ago afore I ever thought of coming down to this and goin' round the country with a lot of foreigners and fiddle-scrapers—begging *your* pardon, sir—the way she would go into Worcester for to hear you tried was a'most past bearin' with. And she was that ill afore she started. I says to her, I says, 'Zubah, you ain't fit to stir out of the house,' I says, and says she, 'Aunt, I shall go, and it's no use of your talkin'.' 'Very well,' I says, 'lookin' as you look now,' I says, 'I shouldn't be surprised if you was to ketch your death.' She was that ill she could hardly walk, and a-tremblin' and faintin' like a'most all the way to the railway-station, and the same all the way to the court. And she no sooner gets to the inside of the buildin', after as bad a crush as ever I see in my life, then she faints stone-dead away."

"It was unadvised," said Tom, to whom all this was painful. "Excuse me, Mrs. Askin, I must see to business."

He had nothing to do, but he wanted to escape from her, so he bustled about and began to overturn a great pile of music, and to make notes which meant nothing. The old woman left him to his thoughts. They were a little complex, but they all drifted about Azubah. There was every reason why the girl should take a friendly interest in his fate. She had known him all her life, and he had been of use to her, and she, no doubt, had been grateful to him. When a young man begins to think much about a young woman, you need scarcely look for any logical sequence in

his thoughts. How very much improved she was. How very pretty she had grown. There was something in her way of looking at one. Curious that he should think about her so much. The artistic nature, and the girl had an artistic nature, is always sensitive. Swooned on entering the court, did she, poor thing? Why, the trial lasted three hours, and he had found her still insensible when he left the dock on his acquittal. Then he remembered how she looked at him when she recovered.

Somehow the old woman's talk did not seem likely to be so painful to him as it had been awhile ago. By this time Azubah was talking to Mme. Fiorituri, for she had, in one way or another, picked up Italian enough to hold a conversation, and Mrs. Askin was sitting at some distance from her. Tom sauntered toward the old lady with a sheet of music in his hand.

"I have found what I was looking for," he said. The most honest of men can not always be expected to speak literal truths. "I am sorry to have interrupted you, Mrs. Askin. You were just telling me that Miss Moore fainted. You could not have got into court at the beginning of the trial."

"Lord bless you, no, sir," said the notable woman. "We might ha' stuck in the crowd till now if Askin's nephew, which is a 'superintendent' in the force hadn't come up to clear the folks away. He sees me of a sudden, when we'd been waiting there two hours at least, regular blocked up and not able to move one way or another all the time, and that hot it felt like a oven, and 'For the Lord's sake, Joseph,' I says, 'get us out of this.' 'No,' says she, 'let us get inside. I must get inside,' she says. So says he, 'This way,' and he takes us by a by-way, and just as we gets into the court we saw you, sir, and the juryman says 'Not guilty,' and the crowd begins to cheer. There was a gentleman there, sir, which perhaps you may remember. His name was Chandler, and he kep' a shop in the town in the linen-drapery line, and I asked him, 'Who's not guilty, for the Lord's sake?' I says, 'Is it Mr. Thomas?' 'It is,' he says, and 'look at your niece.' And there was Azubah swooned dead away."

"Mr. Carroll," said a voice from the foot of the orchestra-stairs. Tom turned. "Waiting for you, sir."

Tom caught up his violin and made for the orchestra.

The noise of applause went through him like an inspiring wind as he stepped upon the platform, and left him no thought but that of his art and the business of the moment. Hoffmann waved his hand, his bow gripped the strings, and he forgot everything but music.

An hour later he was in his own room, at his hotel, smoking a last pipe before turning into bed. What a tender-hearted, sensitive little thing she was, he thought. How lady-like and lovely she had grown. Altogether, how she had improved.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE is a sort of self-conscious young man who in these circumstances would have been able to guess the truth. Perhaps the self-conscious young man is far (in the long run) from having an advantage over the young man who is not self-conscious. He can read unmistakable signs rightly, but he can also read mistakable signs wrongly, and that is sometimes uncomfortable for him. Tom read nothing.

The great Hoffmann's company traveled to all the great provincial cities, and won golden opinions from all sorts of people. M. Strapinski played Tom's sonnets for the pianoforte, the carefully selected and magnificently trained orchestra performed his symphony, Mme. Fiorituri sung his aria, and Miss Moore his last ballad, and he himself played his last nocturne. Altogether there was a good deal of Tom Carroll in the great Hoffmann's programme, and the public applauded him. The critics called him "this genuinely English musician;" the publishers began to find his music in demand, and there was a talk about reviving "Godiva," at one of the London theaters. He bore success modestly, made an income more than equal to his wants, and was fairly happy. People received him (when he had leisure to be received at all) with the consideration due to a member of a good old county family, and he was allowed to feel that he was any man's equal still.

The enterprising Hoffmann was not only a musician with a name to conjure money from the public pocket, but an admirable man of business and first-rate showman. He made arrangements, therefore—knowing when generosity paid him—to give his troupe a holiday here and there, and

he even took the trouble before he finally fixed his engagements to consult the soloists and the members of his orchestra as to the places and times at which they would like the breaks in the week's work to come in. Most of them did not care at all, and when any man did care his voice for the most part settled the matter. Apart from these holidays Hoffmann worked his army fiercely, and himself worked hardest of all.

The spare days had promised to hang somewhat heavily on Tom's hands, but the burden of doing nothing was lightened now that he had a frivolous old woman, and a serious young one, to share it with him. The elder had a convenient knack of going to sleep in the day-time, a thing she attributed to her sleepless nights, forgetful of the fact that an effect does not create a cause. Tom instructed Azubah in counterpoint whilst the old lady was awake, and when she slept he went on with his lessons. Wonderful how interesting—to an enthusiastic musician—the study of counterpoint may be, when the pupil is a girl whose loveliness is a continual surprise, and whose ways are at once frank and shy. There are as many ways of falling in love as there are men and women in the world. To be always closely associated wth a pretty girl who thinks you the handsomest, the wisest, and the best young man in the world, and the most unjustly used, who with perfect delicacy and subtlety lets you understand as much without ever saying a word about it, and obviously does not intend that you should guess her opinions and sentiments—do you think, that in this sort of circumstances you would be pleased with the young woman? If the young woman were really—when you came to look at her—surprisingly pretty, and a little sad for some reason or no reason, and a little in want of help and protection, and sympathy, and society, and all that—do you think you might begin to feel impelled toward her in an odd sort of way?

The way of a man with a maid.

Tom was perfectly certain that he was bound body and soul to his first and only love, though he was also perfectly certain that he could never go and claim her. These contradictory sentiments could not long exist together, and one had to destroy the other. Conviction's fire and doubt's cold water made a rare steam between them for awhile, and then in due course of time, conviction's fire

went out. He had no right to think himself bound to Mary Lording unless she still thought herself bound to him. Since Lording had last called upon him they had held no intercourse, and that was long ago. "I've stuck to you all the time, and I'd stick to you now if you'd let me. But since you won't, I'm going. When you come to your senses I shall be glad to hear from you." He remembered Lording's parting words, and he knew that without active cause of quarrel between them they had parted. It had been in Mary's power to write to him and make things smooth again, but she had never done it. He had never blamed her for her silence even when his affection for her was keenest and his heart was sorest, and now, though he did not like to confess it to himself, he was not at all anxious that she should write in the strain he had once longed to have. He *had* been really, honestly, loyally in love. He himself knew perfectly well that if his love had been crowned by possession he would have gone on loving loyally and tenderly until death divided him from his wife. But then so many things had come between, and events so moving and absorbing had crowded on one another so swiftly, that she had been pressed from his mind.

If men were ruled by inexorable logic the world would be so altered that nobody now alive would know it. Inconsistency is the most consistent of human characteristics and the most abiding. The heart of man wanders, and even women, who love more personally, can love twice in a life-time—happily for us and for themselves. A natural-minded young man can find it in his heart to love almost any lovable young woman who happens to be thrown much in his way and to make an appeal to him, unless his heart is filled already. Now, in this case, Azubah came at the most dangerous time, for his heart was just emptied, and was feeling empty.

If he had guessed the truth he might have avoided her, for fallen as his fortunes were, he would never of purpose aforethought have deliberately married a milkman's daughter. In all his instincts, hereditary and acquired, he was one of the dominant class, and he was a gentleman to the end of his days, though he were three times a fiddler, and even had he fiddled for his bread in the streets. But he only saw a pair of very beautiful and speaking brown eyes and a gentle, pretty face and a charming figure; and knew

only that there was a charming soul behind all these outward signs. He knew that the girl was sympathetic, clever, and possessed by a passionate love of the art which had for years inthralled himself. He knew that he was absolutely at ease with her, and if he had asked himself he would have known that nobody thought so well of him as she did. It was delightful to give lessons to so apt and ambitious a pupil, and it was pleasant to stand as well in his own eyes as she somehow made him.

The girl, on her part, began to be wiser than the man. She knew by this time the meaning of her own symptoms, and was brought to confess to herself that she was in love with her old patron and helper. When a girl makes that sort of confession to herself she is as much ashamed, or nearly, as though the whole of her world had found her out in some act of incredible wickedness. She blushed and hid her face in her hands in the solitude of her own chamber when she first thought of it, and many a time afterward. She would sit and dream with her eyes wide open, and Tom Carroll and she would walk together in vague places until he would bow that magnificent head and turn the light of those wonderful eyes upon her, and his arm would go round her waist and her head fall upon his shoulder, and she would awake in a paroxysm of sweet shame from that entrancing fancy.

They were at Bristol when one of their periodical resting times came about, and a sort of picnic was planned for Ilfracombe. Hoffmann made the affair his own, and ordered a luncheon at the chief hotel. The weather was bright and balmy, and Mrs. Askin went to sleep in the course of the passage across the Channel, though she had made all convenient arrangements for being ill. Tom and Azubah were together during the brief steam-boat journey, and the girl was in a state of fluttering expectancy, as though something strange and unheard-of were certain to happen. They landed, and wandered about the place together as if that were quite natural and in the proper order of things. Other people, who knew more about Tom Carroll than he had yet found out about himself, tacitly agreed to let him alone. The notable woman's free tongue had let everybody know the story as far as she herself knew it, and if anybody had told her, in answer, that the son of her late husband's landlord and the rightful heir to the

Trench House estates were falling in love with her niece, she would have laughed. She recognized the distance between them. That Azubah should fall in love with him would have been too absurd to her mind. If you had asked her, plump and plain, whether she thought Tom Carroll or the Prince of Wales the loftier, she would, of course, have pitched upon the Prince, but, unconsciously and habitually, she thought the Carrolls, of Trench House, the greatest people in the world. Azubah had certainly grown wonderfully fine ladyfied in the last year or two, insomuch that the old woman was a little afraid of her in her inmost heart; but the girl knew her place for all that, and had been bred almost in the shadow of the red-brick mansion at Overhill. In Mrs. Askin's experience love was not the leveler he is in romantic ballads. Gentlefolks married gentlefolks. Bankrupt farmers' daughters might think themselves well off to catch a decent young tradesman. Azubah would probably disgrace herself by an alliance with a fiddler, but Tom, though he got his living by fiddling, was a sacred amateur in her eyes.

The two young people were together all day, and strolled by the water-side together. It might be interesting to know what they found to talk about? Well, for the greater part of their time they talked about harmony and counterpoint and thorough bass. Tom, once astride his hobby with his feet well in the stirrups was hard to throw, and Azubah was as ready to admire him on hobby-back as she would have been elsewhere. It might have been droll, had there been any one to listen, to have heard this handsome young man enthusiastically orating to this charming girl about the exquisite employment of the oboe in Strapinski's last sonata or the noble use of the drum in Hoffmann's orchestrated version of somebody else's theme. His face would glow, his eyes would flash, and he would hum little passages with gestures almost as vivid as his friend Baretti's, and improvised "ta ra ra, la ra ra," nodding his head to the tune. To her, it was an almost unmixed happiness to walk and talk with him in this unrestricted freedom, though now and then reason lifted its head and made a protest against the folly of her dreams.

They went strolling along gayly. Tom was well-mounted and his hobby was as steady to ride as ever. There are men who could find other and more appropriate themes

than thorough bass with such a face and such a pair of eyes beside them, and in a young man Tom's devotion to music was a little absurd at such an hour. Art is all very well in its way, but it does not fill the whole of life. Perhaps he began to be aware of that, for he dismounted from his hobby on a sudden and became preternaturally quiet. He walked on by Azubah's side, and neither of them noticed the way very much or thought about the time.

"It's an odd sort of chance," said Tom at last, looking round on his companion, "that throws us together again in this way."

"Yes," she said, "an odd chance."

"I don't know how it is," said Tom, "but I have been thinking a good deal lately of my childhood. We were playmates one day, do you remember?"

"No," she said with some surprise, "I can't recall it."

He told her drolly of the day on which he had called at the farm and had found her with a small village boy in string harness. For some forgotten reason the steed rebelled against the driver, threw off the harness, and went in dudgeon. Then the driver had besought or commanded the bystander to be harnessed, and Tom had consented, and had been driven shamefacedly all about the farm-house and the fold-yard until, as Fate would have it, Mr. Carroll rode by, and stared with frozen majesty at the spectacle.

"I don't think," said Tom, with a laugh, "that he ever quite recovered from it. I was ten years of age at the time, and you, I think, were three. My father saw a fatal want of dignity about me from that hour."

Azubah took this ridiculous infant reminiscence almost seriously, and Tom felt that any little jest that lay in the remembrance had fallen flat.

"It seems only the other day," he began again, after a pause, "that you were a baby. And now you're a public personage with a great reputation."

Somehow that statement seemed to fall flat also, and her only response was an uncertain little laugh. She had all manner of things to think of. The reminiscence, slight and childish as it was, was a reminder of the distance that had always existed between them. She was thinking, too, how long it would have taken her to climb to the place she stood in without his help, and how ill he could afford the help when he gave it. It was impossible to avoid the

question whether he had cared for her in more than a common way since he had aided her at such a time. She was yearning over him with all her heart, and, as it seemed, with every fiber of her frame, and he knew nothing of it, and would never know.

Tom was quick to discern the change in her manner, but was unable to read it. It chilled him and froze the current of his gay talk. They turned and retraced their steps in silence, and every now and then he stole a look at her. It was not in him by nature to be furtive in any of his ways, but he did not look at her boldly and openly, feeling, as he did, that she was already embarrassed for some reason, and not desiring to embarrass her more. What had he said that could at all disturb her?

He was tall and broad, and she looked very slight beside him. She knew by some mesmeric influence that he was looking at her, and do what she would she could not keep the blushes from her cheek. Then she blushed for blushing, and when he next stole a look at her, though her eyes were downcast she seemed to know it, and her face was all celestial rosy red. He began to guess, and he began to feel an odd tremor at the heart. Pretty? She was sweetly pretty. How delicately the soft, blushing cheek was rounded. Her ear was like a clear, rosy shell. The fine, long lashes lay upon her cheek with a provoking beauty of their own, and surely she had the prettiest lips and chin in the world.

It is so difficult for words to set forth this kind of thing. He was not taking an inventory of her beauties, but they stole on him one by one with a kind of honeyed surprise, and he thought she cared for him a little more than common. An innocent, loyal, brave, and gentle nature he knew she had. If she loved him? He thrilled and flushed at that with a sudden touch of triumph and delight. If he were only an insolent and self-satisfied ass, and she did nothing of the sort? He grew curiously chilly.

They walked back in unbroken silence, and found that they had been so long away that the boat was ready to start, and everybody else belonging to their party was aboard. The sun was down and the first shade of evening was in the air. The moon rose, and Azubah, once more under the shelter of her aunt's wing, sat down and leaned her head upon the vessel's rail, and watched the gathering

film of light in the skies as the nearer planet grew brighter and the distant stars less bright. She knew without turning her head that Tom Carroll was near at hand engaged in the same sort of exercise. The notable woman employed her own happy faculty and got to sleep, and Tom was somehow beside the girl again."

"A lovely night," said Tom, softly.

"A lovely night," she answered, like a pretty echo.

"Don't you find it a little chilly sitting here?" he asked. "Shall we walk along the deck?"

She arose without speaking, and Tom proffered his arm. She took it, and they walked the deck together. It was ridiculous, but he had nothing to say, and, beat about in his mind as he would, he could find nothing that seemed worth saying. Her hand rested on his arm like a warm snow-flake, and passing his right hand across he took hold of it and drew it further. He could feel that it shook a little, and its tremor communicated itself to him. He was making love to the girl he knew, and perhaps he had been doing it longer than he had known. What right had he?

They walked to and fro, and the hand still trembled near his heart. Most of the people were below, and the few on deck were clustered near the wheel watching the great line of moonlight in the water, or chatting gayly in two or three different languages amongst themselves. The bows of the boat rose high, and when the two walked forward Tom could see that the seat immediately below the top-gallant forecastle was in deep shadow. Anybody sitting there would be invisible from amidships. He turned this fact over in his mind with a curious flutter in his breast, answering all the while to that flutter of the little hand upon his arm. Two or three minutes after he had first made observations of this shadow he paused in it and Azubah paused with him.

"Shall we sit down here?" he asked.

She sat down without verbal answer, removing her hand as she did so, and he sat down beside her. He had nothing to say. There was nothing in his mind worth saying. But in a while his arm was about Azubah's waist, and she was not in the least attempting to repulse him. His arm infolded her, and her whole figure swayed to his touch, and her head fell upon his shoulder. He took her right

hand in his left and he bent down and kissed her. Then he made a discovery and hailed it quaintly.

"I am in love," he said to himself, "and I never know what it was like before!"

It is not difficult to fall in love temporarily with a pretty girl when you sit alone with her, shadowed from moonlight, with an arm about her waist, but Tom knew that his hour was come. He was not in love for a minute or a day. It was all over with him, and he surrendered, with that pride and rapture peculiar to his race and sex in like circumstances. To the girl it was or seemed as pure a miracle as ever came to pass, but she was content with it. How they talked (and Tom at least found his tongue in a minute or two) is no affair of yours or mine. It was all settled between them before the boat reached the quay, though the journey seemed disappointingly short, and when Mrs. Askin awoke at the bustle about her, Tom approached her resolutely, and led her ashore.

"Mrs. Askin," he said, when they had bade "Good-night" to the rest of their party, "I have news for you. Azubah and I are going to be married."

The old lady gasped, and would have sat down in the road-way if Tom had not already given her his arm.

"The Lord help you, sir," she said, "but the squire will never overlook it, and you'll be no better than a fiddler to the end of your days."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHILST Tom was making the most of this new happiness of his, Baretti was painting away in London in an almost melodramatic gloom of spirit. He knew nothing of Tom's utter faithlessness to his old love, and he still held himself bound by all the old ties of friendship, gratitude, and honor which had hitherto so strongly held him.

Most people were out of town, but Baretti stayed behind and worked. Lording and Mary were in Switzerland, and the painter's heart if not his body was with them. He would tear himself out of languor and despondency, and would work at his easel like a slave during the hours of light the long days of late summer afforded, but at night he would droop and would sit alone with his unlighted

pipe between his teeth, surveying a sorrowful and lonely future. There is no doubt he suffered more than he need have done, but that is true of most people. Half the troubles of the world are wantonly created or wantonly fomented, and when a young man is hopelessly in love he likes to suffer.

Yet everything was real enough to Baretti, and his own passionate temperament made his tongue-tied love a heavy burden to him. If he had been free to speak and then to go away somewhere, anywhere! But to speak would have been to cover himself with dishonor and to sacrifice everything for which, in these late years, he had so intensely struggled. No, no, no. Everything he had and was, was Carroll's. It was Carroll who had saved him, Carroll who had made him, Carroll to whom he owed all things. Not a whisper to dishonor the purity and completeness of his love for his preserver should ever pass his lips.

The devil tempted him, of course. Tom and Lording were far apart, and likely enough to be permanently divided. Tom was out in the cold, and Baretti was in the inmost circle of art and fashion, and raking in money hand over hand. The poor fiddler's last chance of marrying the heiress was gone—the wealthy painter might speak and might have a chance with her. There was no great barrier of descent between them; Mary was simply a lady, and Baretti had a right to claim to be called a gentleman.

No man lives entirely in the mill-wheel-round of one emotion, and no emotion is always equal in its forces. There were a thousand other things to think of in the world. But, after all; this was the dominant of Baretti's life, and was so present with him as to make other hopes, wishes, and concerns feeble beside it. Sometimes it was terrible to suffer, sometimes it was sweet to suffer, as lovers have a knack of ruling things. Altogether it would not be easy to exaggerate the virtue which held him so firmly to his gratitude, and so far away from his love. It has been said already that gratitude was a passion with him, but the passions are not alike in strength, and when gratitude wrestles against love, a dwarf is pitted against a giant.

The poor painter's greatest treasure, and solace, and torment was that first sketch he had made for Mary Lording's portrait. It drew him with a singular fascination in

this time of loneliness, and he often took it from its hiding-place and smoked his pipe before it in a mood of adoration, sometimes passionate, and sometimes tender. No saint ever had such yearnings toward his favorite shrine.

The fountain sparkled in the sunlight, and the garden gleamed behind the beautiful figure. The branches moved about her, and the summer breeze had caught that one loose wave of hair which lay across her forehead. Her eyes smiled welcome still, and her feet were ready to step from the canvas. Any man who has been in love can guess what all this was to him, with what desires it filled him, with what despairs it wrung him.

He sat one evening looking at this portrait until the shadows began to gather pretty thickly and he could see it no longer. Then he arose and drew the curtains, and lit his lamps, and sat down again to his feast of grief and passion. Once he arose and kissed the face that smiled so upon him—a poor satisfaction as any lover may guess. But after that he began to pace the room in a new trouble.

"This," he said, as he went up and down, "is disloyal to the very heart of things. What right have I to think of her at all? I must tear her from my heart altogether. I must burn her portrait. I have no right to keep it. One of these days I shall lose all self-possession, and all I have suffered will be wasted. I must burn it!"

Burn it? It felt like burning his own heart—and burning the actual woman he loved along with it. The very smile the pictured face wore seemed to beseech him. He walked in great agitation for a time, pausing now and then to look at the smiling face.

"You must go," he said, at length, speaking under his breath. "We must part. You make me mad with longing, and fill me with traitorous thoughts. You must go. We must part."

He would wrap her in cerements of lead, and let her fall into the river where she could lie deep, and decay slowly, out of sight, as dead things should do. She would be dead then to him, and his passion was so strong that even this fanciful idea took such a hold of him, that he felt like a murderer in the contemplation of it. He marched up and down the room, but his thoughts were away in a peaceful reach of the Thames he knew, and over and over and over

again he committed his treasure to its grave. He saw the water divide, and he watched the ripples as they rounded and died away.

It was a sore struggle altogether, and only a lover could understand the man, or the battle that raged within him. But at last he made up his mind. It was altogether unwholesome for the soul to submit to the intoxication his thoughts before this picture brought him. Even if Mary were lost to Carroll forever—even if that best and most generous and lovable of men must lose her and must bear the unspeakable pang of thinking of her as in another man's embraces, it could never be Baretti's happiness that should bring such misery to his friend. All this was fiery, and high-flown, and romantic somewhat beyond the common run, but then it was in the man's nature, and to him it was all as real as his half-crowns are to a money-grubber, his patent to an inventor, his acres to a land-owner, your grief to you.

A good share of a man's duties lies in the attempt to compel himself to feel that something is dearer than the dearest. With Baretti, as with countless thousands of men before him, the choice lay between love and honor. Love was infinitely dearest, and therein lay a confession from which his soul revolted. He must, he would make honor yet dearer. How easy to let honor go, if only for a day or two, how hard to lose love for a moment, how hard even to think of it. You can forgive the southern nature its little flashes of melodrama, its exultation in its own pain, its wanton blowing of the flames. When humbug grows melodramatic you know its hollow rant and stagey strides, mouthing periods. You can laugh at all that with an excellent appetite for humor. But you forgive a little of what looks like play-acting to a man whose heart is in agony, who stands torn between love and honor, and fights away from love to cast in his lot with her cold enemy.

It took Baretti the whole of that night to win, but he won at last, and he knew that he had conquered. He took the picture from its place and set it in his arm-chair, with a lamp on either side of it, and he knelt down before it and said good-bye. He kissed the face with tears of last renunciation and farewell, and he laid the picture on the cushioned seat and laid his head upon it, and his arms around it.

It was bright morning outside by this time, but he knew nothing of that. There was some peace in his heart already, partly because nobody can go on suffering forever, and pain brings relief by sheer fatigue at last, and partly because he knew that he had won the greatest fight of his life. No man but himself would ever know it, and he had only fought for a fancy after all, yet what is life but thought? He had conquered, and in no thought of his heart could he ever be false to Carroll any more. But he was tired, tired, and as he knelt there over the picture with his tumbled black curls resting on it he fell asleep.

The great Hoffmann had explored Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Edinburgh, all the giant places that lie outside London, and the smaller cities were now being awakened by the prospect of his coming. After Bristol, Gloucester lay next upon his programme, and this began to bring Tom near home again. In Worcester he had flatly refused to appear for reasons which are likely to be obvious.

When he had parted from Azubah on that fateful night, he had gone straight home to his hotel and had resigned himself to his own thoughts. They were somewhat wild and incoherent to begin with, and he was not at first so perfectly sure that he was happy as he felt he ought to have been. He was sufficiently divided from his father already, but this new step of his had widened the gap beyond closure. There was something to take the gilt off his joy and triumph in that reflection. Then Lording would know of it, and Mary would know of it, and all his world would hear it. Well, it was done, and as he thought of the matter his heart warmed again in due time, and he was ready to face anything and everything.

It came quite suddenly into his mind that he had ample time to run up by the night mail and see Azubah's father. He would rather tell him of this by word of mouth than by letter, and he would like to take Baretti into his confidence too. Without giving himself time to grow cool on this fancy, he scrawled a hasty line to Azubah, and having packed his portmanteau and filled his cigar-case, he set out by cab for the railway station, and embarked upon his journey. He succeeded in getting a carriage to himself, tucked himself comfortably in his rug, set his portmanteau beneath his head for a pillow, and fell off to sleep quite

joyously. From some cause or other the train was delayed, and he reached London more than an hour beyond his time. He was not sorry for this, since he had already arrived at a rather unholy sort of hour. He drank a cup of coffee at a coffee-house near the station, and then, portmanteau in hand, set out for his old residence in Montague Gardens. When he arrived the maid was cleaning the steps, and he gave her a beaming good-morning. She arose with a little scream of surprise, and stood wiping her hands on her apron and courtesying before him with a face of unmistakable welcome.

"Mr. Baretti is in town, I suppose?" said Tom.

"Oh! yes, sir," said the maid; "but I don't suppose you'll find him up yet."

"Never mind," returned Tom; "I'll wait in the studio until he awakes."

The maid opened the door and stood by for him to pass. He ascended the stairs with great quiet, and for a moment paused before the door which led to his own old chambers with a passing wonder as to what manner of man lived in there now. Then he went upward on tiptoe toward Baretti's rooms, and, turning the handle of the studio door almost stealthily, he entered. There were two lamps burning dimly and set on chairs, and, though it was broad daylight outside, everything was dusky and undefined within the room. He walked forward and turned up the wick of one of the lamps, and, to his sudden terror and surprise, saw Baretti, half-kneeling, half-lying at the arm-chair between them. It seemed to Tom's eyes as if the painter had fallen there in a swoon. The first thing he did was to sweep aside the curtains, so that the light rushed in and left each lamp a sulky blot against the morning.

"Baretti," he cried, returning to the prostrate figure and seizing it by the shoulder. "Baretti! what is the matter?"

The painter awoke and staggered half blindly to his feet. Tom caught sight of the picture.

"You here, Carroll. What is the matter?"

Then Baretti caught sight of the picture also, and remembered all, but being only half awakened, snatched at it and took it to his breast to hide it. Not a second later he saw what he had done. His resolve had gone for nothing and he had betrayed himself.

"Baretti," said Tom, gently. "Baretti." There was a world of meaning in his voice to the painter's hearing. It sounded like the utterance of judgment on disloyalty. He had not a word to say. He had betrayed himself and Carroll could guess everything. "Let me look," said Tom, laying a hand upon the picture. Baretti surrendered it without resistance, and stood before him, drooping his head like a man detected in a crime. "You never told me of this."

Nobody but a fool could have misread the case, and Tom, without pausing to ask himself a question, knew it all. Baretti's looks and attitude told everything.

"You always cared for her?" said Tom. "From the beginning?" He recalled things that had happened two or three years ago as if they had been affairs of yesterday. Baretti offered no answer, still reading in his friend's voice the voice of judgment. "You never spoke to me or her."

"Never," said Baretti. "Believe what you will of me but that." He spoke this with bent head, and an attitude altogether despairing, but suddenly he flashed upright in his own vehement way, and stood with clasped hands before his face—"Believe anything but that."

"God bless you, old fellow," cried Tom, throwing the picture away, and seizing the outstretched hands. "Tell me the truth. Tell me everything. Do you—care for her?" Baretti hung his head anew, and said nothing. "Be candid with me," said Tom. "I will be candid with you to begin with. I have news for you. I am engaged to be married."

Baretti stopped him before he could speak another word. "I have cleared my heart of every weakness. I can be happy to see you happy."

"My dear, dear old fellow," cried Tom, wringing the painter's hands. "Let us play at no cross purposes. You are in love with Miss Lording. Tell me the truth." Baretti hung his head again and said nothing. "And you have hidden it for my sake? Well—go and woo and win her, man, and wear her worthily."

Baretti stared at him like a madman.

"My dear fellow," cried Tom, "I am engaged to be married, as I told you. I haven't thought of Miss Lording for a year and a half past."

Baretti glared at him and then fairly blazed:

"You threw her away?"

"Congratulate me, Baretti," said Tom, half hysterically, for his curious interview had shaken him. "I am going to be married early in September. I came up to town," he hurried on, not daring to pause, "on purpose to tell you. You remember Miss Moore; you have no idea—"

He stopped short there suddenly. Even to a friend like Baretti he could not say the things that were sacrilegious to himself. How she had improved? How she had altered for the better? He was in love with her, and he knew perfectly well (as your true lover always does) that she was worth ten thousand of him. And yet he had been on the edge of such a blasphemy of her perfections.

Life-long habit against new-grown passion. But even if he had not been her lover, the gentleman's instinct would have pulled him up.

"You are engaged to Miss Moore?" said Baretti, like a man in a dream.

"I am engaged to Miss Moore," said Tom, "and we are to be married in September."

"Carroll," cried Baretti, "I have wasted more repentance than ever was wasted before. You shall know, my friend, you shall know. I thought you loved her. And I knelt last night before her picture and said good-bye to her, and put her away out of my heart."

"You care for her?" said Tom again. "I have been like a blind man, Baretti. You have cared for her all along."

"I loved her," said Baretti, looking straight in his friend's eyes, "from the first hour I ever saw her. That is why I ran away to Naples."

"No man ever wished a friend good fortune with a better heart," said Tom, shaking Baretti's hands once more.

The painter for the first time returned the pressure, and suddenly turning away hurried into his bedroom. Tom being thus left alone, forbore to follow, but sat down, and half mechanically lit a cigar. When he had thrown away the picture it had fallen face downward on the seat of the arm-chair, and he stretched forth a hand and set it up so that he could see it. Any but a blind man would have had to confess that the face was lovely, but he looked at it with a sort of wonder that he had ever loved it. It lacked the

something he knew now. There was not a fault in it. It was not only beautiful, but it looked good, and true, and honest, and amiable. It spoke all womanly virtues and sweetness, and he had loved the woman it presented to him once, and loved her loyally. And yet he knew a sweeter face, not so beautiful and infinitely more beautiful, and he was contented enough with his own prospects. There is just a likelihood that he had seen love in the one face, and had not seen it in the other Mary's look had never flattered that lofty and delicate egotism which is, after all, a part of a man's love, though he rarely guesses it. In ninety cases out of a hundred it is the woman's worship that wins a lasting love, and in the remaining ten her cool disdain.

But it is a bold game to analyze where analysis must necessarily give offense, and be the more offensive in proportion to its truthfulness. I might make confession, but my friends may not be in the humor.

Tom smoked for an hour well contented, and at the end of that time Baretti, who had moved with such sly silence that his friend had not heard a sound, emerged from his bedroom, dragging a big portmanteau after him. He was dressed as if for a journey, and he hung his head in a mingled tremor of joy and shamefacedness.

"Why, what is this?" said Tom, with a semblance of gayety.

"I am going to Switzerland," said Baretti.

CHAPTER XXXV.

When the news came to Thomas Carroll the elder that Nephew Mark was being hunted as a perjurer and that son Thomas had been set free and pronounced blameless, it was naturally a shock to him. For once in his life (he had to confess it to himself) he had been mistaken. The impossible had happened, and after that one might be ready to believe in almost anything.

He, Thomas Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, had made a mistake, and after his recognition of that fact the universe might well seem topsy-turvy. He did not hold his head so well up as he had used to do, and he began to age with astonishing rapidity. His old public haunts knew

him no more; he had spoken his last pompous judgment from the bench, attended his last licensing meeting, taken the chair at the last agricultural dinner. He was old, he was friendless, he was lonely, and he had been horribly ill-used. If Tom had come to him to beg his pardon and to promise an atonement for the future he could almost have found it in his heart to forgive him and to take him back again.

The clergyman of the parish called and tried to make peace beween Mr. Carroll and Tom, and made so little by his movement that he vowed never to enter the house again.

"You are all very well in your way, no doubt, sir," said Mr. Carroll, "and you perform to my satisfaction the duties of the position to which I appointed you; but in presuming to advise me, sir, you forget yourself."

A clergyman advising Lording, for instance, would have seemed a natural spectacle enough—the representative of the Church had a constitutional right to advise—but to preach to him? His gall had not been so stirred for many a day.

Yet, thinking things over, he was more and more inclined to hope that Tom would come and beg his pardon and renounce his present mode of life and become a gentleman once more. Of course the lad had been to blame, but he had suffered beyond his deserts; and the old gentleman was so far softened that he was prepared to be flattered and appealed to and made much of. He felt wonderfully magnanimous when the thought of his own readiness to accept Tom's apology and repentance, and he felt oftentimes extremely angry that Tom did not take advantage of his generosity.

The one thing which made Tom at all noticeable to the elder Carroll was the fact that he bore his own charmed name. He knew nothing of his growing musical fame, or the curious interest with which the public mind surrounded him. But the newspapers were wiser, and Tom was a celebrity. The great man's amazement when he met his own name in print in close connection with Azubah Moore's and Tom's was a thing only to be described as superlative. "We understand," said the great daily intelligencer of fashion, "that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Thomas Carroll, the well-known composer,

and Miss Moore of Overhill. The lady is a daughter of a tenant on the estate of Mr. Carroll, senior."

When the first shock of amazement was over, Mr. Carroll senior contented himself for a little while by the stiffest possible certainty that the whole story was a lie. Tom seemed to be a mark for scandal of one sort or another. By and by this certainty began to loosen and to spread into a tangle of *un*certainty, and at last, after a day or two, he cut out the paragraph which had so amazed him, gummed it to a sheet of letter-paper, and wrote beneath it:

"SIR,—Oblige me by contradicting this report.

"Yours, etc.,

"THOMAS CARROLL."

When he had folded up this lordly note and had directed and sealed it, he began to doubt whether he would send it after all. He set it, in this indecision, in one of the drawers in his writing-desk, and locked it there; and every day his sense of dignity and his wishes had a fight together when he went to look at the note, and debated whether he should send it. One morning, not more than a week after he had read the announcement of Tom's impending marriage, he saw, at his solitary breakfast-table, another proclamation which took him by surprise. "We understand," said Fashion's intelligencer, "that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Antonio Baretti, A.R.A., and Mary, only daughter of Mr. Lording, of Beech Tree Hall, Worcestershire."

Surely the world was upside down.

People called upon him at times, and he was not altogether shut in from the world. He heard, and even invited, opinions upon the astounding news above recorded. It become evident to him that the world at large had gone mad, and he began to be seriously of belief that he was the only sane man left in the country.

Still reading day by day the columns of the intelligencer of Fashion, he found, one morning, a record of the marriage of Mr. Antonio Baretti, A.R.A., and Mary, only daughter of Charles Lording, Esq. Scarcely had he read this through than he fell upon "CARROLL—MOORE," and read that Thomas Carroll and Azubah Moore were also united in the bonds of matrimony. The first thing he did

was to ring his bell, and, this summons being answered by the butler, he gave him solemn warning and a check for six months' wages. Then he sent for the other servants, one by one, and dismissed and paid each of them, down to coachman, groom, and stable-boy. The domestics, consulting with each other, believed that they saw a peculiar something in his manner, and determined to send for a doctor. The doctor came and managed to pretend a casual visit. To his surprise, the master of the house received him with open hands.

"You arrive at an auspicious moment," he said graciously, "and I am glad to welcome the first volunteer in favor of my scheme."

"I do not as yet," said the doctor, cautiously, "fully understand your scheme, sir."

"No?" said Mr. Carroll, with a pitying smile. "I had thought it clear even to the world's intelligence."

Doctor Morton began to be sure of what the servants had only suspected.

"Pardon my dullness, Mr. Carroll," he said, with suavity and submission, "may I beg that you will be good enough to instruct me?"

"With pleasure," said the master of the house. "My asylum is open to the world at large, but I receive volunteers only. You display some power of reflection by coming here at all, and I have hope of your ultimate cure."

"I am happy to hear you say so," returned the doctor, beginning to see his way. "I shall be delighted if you will undertake my case."

"Morton," said Mr. Carroll, "you have lucid moments. I have hope of you."

"I trust, sir," said the doctor, shrewdly, "that you may be induced to extend your benevolence to at least one or two of your old servants."

"Nothing will delight me more," he answered, majestically. "But not one of them has made submission."

After some further parley the doctor secured leave to act as Carroll's embassador, and took advantage of the first moment of absence to wire to Tom that his father was in a serious condition, and that it would be necessary for him at once to call upon the family lawyer in town. Next he wired to the family lawyer, and then gave the servants instructions to stay in the house for the time being. Should

they meet their master, they were to agree to everything he said.

Mr. Carroll watched the doctor with great care, and had more and more hope of his recovery. The doctor held the situation with great skill, but, do all he could, he was unable to keep the news from the village. Before either Tom or the family lawyer could arrive the whole population of Overhill knew that the squire's intellect had given way. His delusion was that the whole world was mad, and that he, being the only sane creature left in it, was appointed to be its deliverer. He was absolutely harmless, and no more pompous in his manner than of old. He introduced the doctor to people about the village as a promising patient, and held him up as an example to be followed.

Tom and the lawyer arrived together, and he welcomed them as an accession to his stock of likely cases.

"My dear Tom," he said suavely, "I could wish that I had adopted this course earlier. But it is only of late days that I have become convinced of the truth, and in judging you at the time I made no allowance for the general mental aberration of the world. It is not yet recognized, but in time it will be. The whole world is mad. Providence has been pleased to spare me from the general affliction, and I shall make it my humble duty to inaugurate a cure. I hope to do no more, for the span of life is brief and the task promises to be almost endless."

All this was very terrible for Tom to listen to, but he got through with it as well as he could, and assented to everything.

"I believe you are married, Tom?" said the elder, after a pause.

"Yes, sir," returned Tom, dreading an outburst which might result in damage.

"A total abolition of association between the sexes would perhaps be the shortest way to an universal cure," said his father calmly. "But that can not be hoped for. The best thing you can do will be to bring your wife here and allow her to be placed under my control and influence. If she assents willingly—not otherwise. I am too hampered by want of time to undertake the hopeless cases. The only way with them will be to let them die out."

All things considered, this seemed the wisest thing to do for the moment, even though a madman had suggested it.

The man of law went back to his business, and when he was questioned as to his client's sanity, he had but one answer:

"Mr. Carroll says now what he thought always."

This was no doubt a somewhat crude presentation of the case, but there was a taste of truth in it.

Tom could not desert his father at such a time as this, and Azubah would not be separated from her husband. So they took up their abode at Trench House, and, in spite of their affection for each other, were but a sad young pair of married lovers for a month or two. Mr. Carroll treated them with great kindness.

"I compel your will in nothing," he would say. "My aim is to inspire by example."

So they did whatever they wished, and had perfect freedom; but there was always a shade upon the house, and upon their hearts.

The county neighbors were, of course, all anxiety to see Tom's rustic bride. They found out by and by that the Parish Church was the only place in which they had a chance of seeing her, and those who were far afield from Overhill got invitations from the local magnates, and went to church with the laudable purpose of staring at her. The concert platform is a school in which a woman can learn a look of perfect self-possession, and Azubah had learned it. When the county magnates stared at the rustic bride, they saw a lady of charming aspect, who moved as gracefully and naturally as a bird flies or a fish swims. Walking is a rare art amongst English women, and she had it to perfection. She was so dressed that her dress might have been born with her and grown up with her—the result of artistic taste and a simple nature. When they heard her speak—and only a few of them as yet had the opportunity—they made note of a voice singularly soft and liquid. This pleasing organ was set to good English without a trace of rusticity in its tone. They were bound to own that she looked like a lady, talked like a lady, and bore herself like a lady, and having been compelled to these admissions, they agreed gravely that it was easy to acquire a veneer of good manners.

Now, you veneer worthless goods, but good ones you are content to polish. Nobody veneers ebony, satinwood, or walnut. These have their good looks internally, and in

like manner and for like reason Tom's wife stood in need of no veneer. Even the county magnates have found this out by now, for the world is at large good-natured, and can forget its own egotisms if you give it time.

Mr. Carroll kept his asylum and watched his keeper with kindly dignity and diligence for the space of one year. At the end of that time he slept with his fathers, and was lamented. His year of madness was marked by a wonderful gentleness toward all people, and he was the very pink of courtesy. The only sane man in a world of lunatics, he made allowances, and nothing perturbed him. Had he lasted longer, he might have lived to be as well-beloved as any man in the county, for there was a sweetness about him which few could resist. Everybody humored him and was gentle with him in remembrance of his affliction; and he, pitying that affliction in all mankind, humored everybody, and was gentle with high and low.

A year later (and that comparatively is but the other day) the heir to Trench House began really to take the place in the world to which his position, his abilities and his nature gave him title. There is no man happier and there are few more prosperous, though there are many who might beat him at the game of counting sovereigns.

There was a little odd strangeness for awhile between Tom and Baretti. You see that Mrs. Baretti had once been engaged to Tom, and that the engagement had never been formally annulled when both the faithless ones got married. That feeling wore away, and they are as stanch friends as ever. Baretti lives at Beech Tree Hall and paints there, and Lording is prodigiously proud of him. A masterpiece of portraiture which hangs in the dining-room at this hour represents an old gentleman of genial British aspect, in a dressing-gown, looking at a young lady of lovely exterior, who has an olive-colored half-nude young rascal in her lap; a lad with beautiful limbs, and eyes, and curls like Baretti's.

Tom is at work on a new opera which is to give England a *right* to *claim* a place in the world of music. Baretti swears it, and when men talk of Wagner, or Verdi, or Gounod as possible rivals to Tom Carroll, he shrugs his shoulders and abandons discussion. To Tom's mind Baretti is the greatest painter in the world, and they are bosom friends still, and likely to be.

"Carroll," said the little man one night as they sat together in a half-darkness by the fireside after dinner at Tom's house. "Carroll, are you happy?"

"As the day is long," said Tom. "And so are you?"

"There is no man happier in the world," returned the painter. He arose and paced up and down in the old way. "It is strange," he said, after a long pause, "but everything is strange. It was a villain's struggle to damage *you* which made *me* happy. He left you unharmed in the long run, too."

"Poor Mark," said Tom. "It was a bitter close to a sad chapter, Baretti."

"I thank God solemnly that he died in prison," said Baretti. "I thank God solemnly that there is yet to be found here and there a touch of justice in the world. I thank God that he lives no longer to blot an honorable name and to be a thorn in the best and gentlest heart I ever knew."

THE END.

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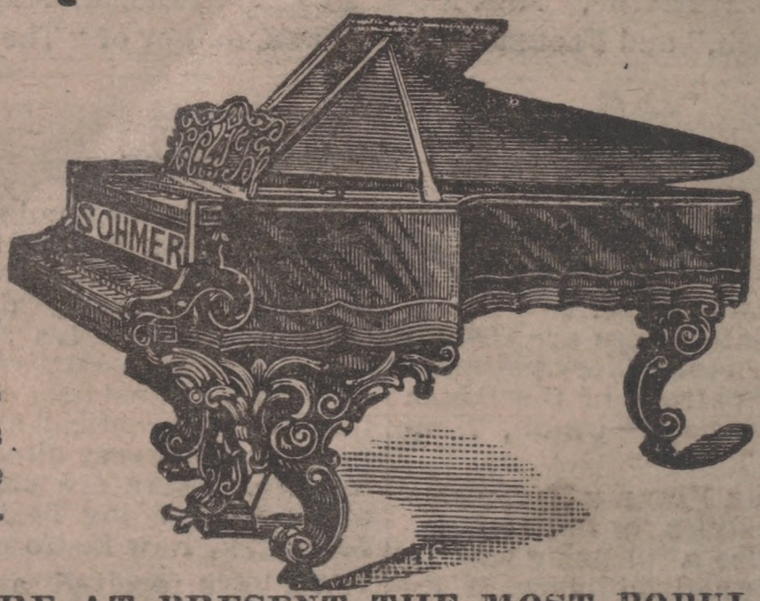

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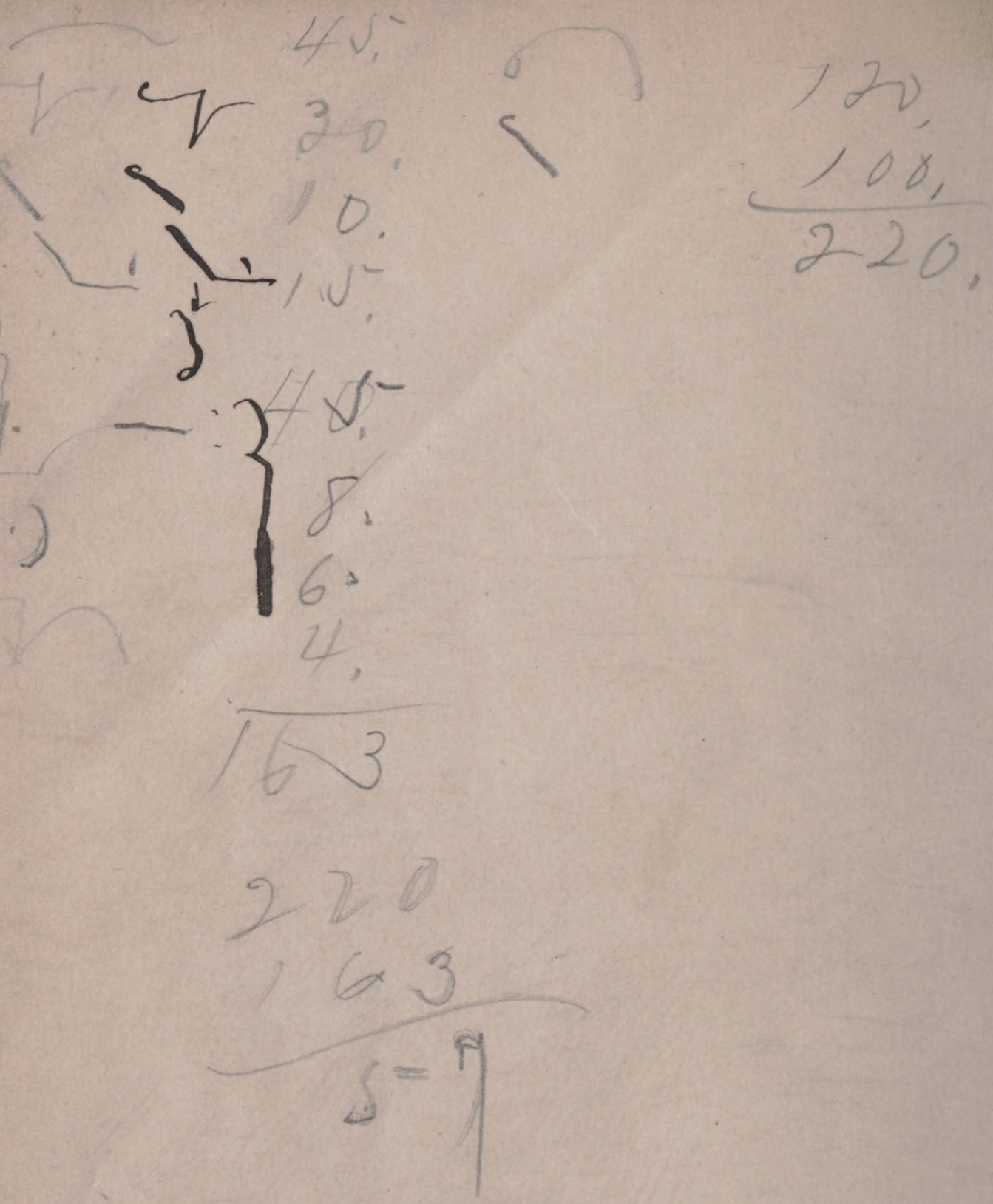
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